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Measuring Poetry: A Self-Study of Teacher Effectiveness in A 12th Grade Advanced Placement Literature and Composition Class

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MEASURING POETRY:
A SELF-STUDY OF TEACHER EFFECTIVENESS IN A 12TH GRADE ADVANCED PLACEMENT LITERATURE AND COMPOSITION CLASS

By

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Dedicated to the glory and honor of Jesus Christ,
    To Allie, the love of my life,
And to Dr. Susan Wood, my friend and mentor.
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This study examines the effectiveness of the author’s implementation of a unit on poetry in a class of 12th grade Advanced Placement (AP) Literature and Composition. Situated in the educational dilemmas of assessment and accountability in the teaching of English Literature within the context of a student teaching experience, the study employs analysis of student learning gains through pre- and posttests, as well as other student work. A narrative of the author’s experience and growth as a teacher is examined and suggestions are offered for teachers of AP Literature classes.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

This study’s purpose was to examine my effectiveness as a teacher of 12th graders in an AP Literature poetry unit. Using a teacher action research model, my effectiveness was considered in light of the increasing demand for the accountability of educators in public schools, the complexity of student needs, and the issue of research in the classroom.

Background of Study

I began my program of studies in English Education at Florida State University in 2002, following a time of genuine soul-searching regarding career choices. Time spent as an employee at a drug treatment program for adolescent males had convinced me that working with young people as a teacher was a way to really impact lives, offering students the choice to live their lives to their fullest potential. Though Florida offers temporary certification to potential educators who hold Bachelor’s degrees, I chose a teacher education program because I felt that by obtaining that level of expertise, I could offer my students the best possible education. If I was well-trained, the quality of their learning and lives could improve. The student teaching/internship experience was particularly interesting to me because it offered me a chance to learn experientially in a classroom setting before I entered as my students’ full-time teacher.

I also elected to do a Master’s thesis, though not a requirement of my program, as I came to believe during my course of studies that teachers can and should be researchers. The model I used in this study, teacher action research (Section 2), was one we studied in my program, and I felt was important and appropriate when considering the great need for teacher input in solutions to problems in our system of public education. As a teacher, I wanted to be able to suggest solutions through my own research to advocate for students at large. The reflective nature of the process also appealed to me because it gave me the ability to step back and examine my teaching
from a vantage point other than being the teacher. Acting as a researcher, I was able to examine my own practice and make recommendations for improvement. This skill, I reasoned, could only benefit my future students, as the quality of my instruction improved.

My student teaching semester, during the spring of 2004, was a good time to implement my study because it was my first chance to experience teaching firsthand for an extended period of time. Of course, it was also a busy time, and I was thankful that my research methods (Section 3) did not require any more of my energy while I was actually in the midst of the semester. I could see how teachers could be daunted by the huge task of “research” looming over them during a school year, but I found that even during the very challenging and exciting first days with my students, research did not have to be cumbersome.

From the outset, I was intrigued by the prospect of teaching 12th grade Advanced Placement classes. I am a veteran of both AP Language and AP Literature from my high school days, and felt I had something to offer classes of students that I knew would be both bright and motivated. For my study, I decided to use the unit on poetry that my supervising teacher had planned for me to teach during the semester. The unit would balance the study of literature and the compositional skills that are necessary for students when approaching the AP Literature exam. It would also provide me time to gauge my own effectiveness by looking at how much students learned during the unit, which was the primary goal of my research.

This is a qualitative study that examines my effectiveness as an instructor during my student teaching semester, while teaching a unit on poetry to a class of 12th grade AP Literature students. It is of importance, therefore, to examine briefly some of the issues that were present for me as a teacher/researcher when entering this scenario. Moving from more general to more particular issues places the study in context of larger problems in education and explains what concerns had to be addressed in designing the unit and therefore, the study.

**Increased Accountability and Standardized Testing**

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), ratified by the U.S. Congress on January 8th, 2002, affected the public education system in many ways, but perhaps none as much as
the idea of “accountability” to the prime stakeholders of a child’s education: the parents, educators and the school district, the state, the government in general (Behuniak, 2002). NCLB is aimed at the statistic that shows a plateau in the amount of children who are reading at a “proficient” level, in spite of increased government spending towards this issue. The Act proposed to increase accountability in this and other areas of education, primarily by requiring states to assess student performance with their own standardized tests. As such, “accountability” has become a watchword in our educational bureaucracy, and educators are expected to use scientifically-based “research-proven” teaching strategies to increase performance on these standards-based assessments (U. S. Dept. of Education, n.d.).

In Florida, that standards-based test is known as the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). Scores are expected to improve, and schools are given financial incentives to achieve a higher alphabetical ranking (“A” being the highest and “F” being the lowest). Administrators and other educational leaders expect growth in terms of numbers. However, the only picture of growth they receive is from the FCAT, which has both norm- and criterion-referenced components (Florida Dept. of Education, 2003). Norm-referencing bases students’ scores against the scores of others, while another kind of assessment, criterion-referencing, bases scores on specific criteria set by test designers (McNamara, 2000).

The increase in the use of tests as the ultimate measurement of student achievement leads to an educational climate that is very friendly to Advanced Placement tests, and their corresponding classes. Not only are schools and teachers offered money for their students’ high performance on these tests (OneFlorida, 2002), but the test-driven process has other value as well. Educators can see at a glance the educational growth of students, in terms of standardized numbers, and because they are calibrated to the same international standard, offer comparative insights. The organization that creates the tests and AP curriculum, College Board, Inc., also creates notable “gatekeeping” assessments like the SAT and the GRE, and is now launching a new set of standards called “Springboard,” aimed at middle-schoolers (College Board, 2004b).

The preeminence of College Board and its standards, along with the emphasis on standards-based education using norm-referenced tests, warrants teacher understanding of the tests in order to adequately prepare students to take them.
Unfortunately, this preparation sometimes results in students spending a distressing amount of time learning how to score well on the test instead of focusing on the material they are supposed to learn, or only learning how to answer the kinds of questions posed them on the tests for which they are preparing. Teachers are affected as well and must implement changes to their curriculum and methodology as the test changes.

The Role of Classroom-Based Research

Teacher action research, done directly by teachers in their own classrooms, can answer the call voiced by No Child Left Behind, without disregarding the idea of educating the whole person, in a number of ways. First, it can provide numbers for stakeholders who are numbers-driven. Student learning gains can be measured and plotted over periods of time, and growth demonstrated through many different assessment techniques. A single norm-referenced test may be able to show what a student knows at one period in time, but other assessments can give stakeholders the big picture. Instruction using more criterion-referenced assessments provides for measurement of student learning gains against a student’s own performance, instead of that of others. Projects, oral presentations, and personal response logs are all ways of measuring the same data that norm-referenced tests gather. Teacher action research provides for time to measure a student’s work (Wells, 1994; Burns, 1999; Macintyre, 2000; Rogers, 2004).

Teacher action research empowers teachers to contribute to the research base (Sagor, 1992; Wells, 1994). Much can be said for the work of educational researchers coming into schools, and for fresh pairs of eyes looking at problems that educators within the schools are addressing. However, no one knows those problems and the capacity of students like the teachers who work every day in those learning environments. It is important that both teachers and outside researchers collaborate to achieve the goal set by No Child Left Behind of looking for methods that are both research-proven and effective.

The relative closeness of the teacher as researcher to the research problem can also be said to virtually eliminate the observer’s paradox (Labov, 1972). This paradox
states that by trying to observe a situation that occurs naturally, one inserts oneself into the situation, making it unnatural and different. A teacher is already an integral part of the learning environment, and thus does not present a distraction from learning that is ongoing. Of course, pure objectivity is impossible, but including a teacher’s perspective in the body of research (normally only the domain of outside researchers) is important in order to get a full view of the learning happening in our schools. If our goal is to find and use research-proven strategies for instruction, then teachers should be a part of that dialogue, helping to shape instruction on a local level and beyond.

Simply said, for Florida schools, research conducted by teachers in their own classrooms offers a viable way of testing and proving what good teachers already know: how to give students real-world skills that prepare them for the tests that inevitably await them and the real world after public school, while educating the whole student. Student needs always extend beyond passing that next test, no matter how important the goal is just beyond the test, and no matter how vital the skills learned are in achieving success on said test.

Effective education provides not only skills for sustaining life, but provides students with challenges and experiences that make up the essence of human existence (Baines & Stanley, 2003). A holistic approach must be taken without ignorance of how the testing/standards system works, out of sheer responsibility to students, but can be done without strictly “teaching to the test.” Teacher action research can also give administrators and bureaucrats the numbers they need and present a side of student learning gains that norm-referenced tests alone may never uncover.

**Student Teaching in an AP Classroom**

One of the main issues for me in teaching this unit was being a student teacher. A student teacher brings to the classroom less prior experience being in front of a class, assessing student needs, planning curriculum and designing lessons. The supervising teacher must be relied upon to guide the student teacher in instructing their particular class, as the supervising teacher has also had more time to learn about the students and the ways they learn best. By the same token, the student teacher may bring to the classroom a new perspective on student learning that may amplify or augment the
experience of the supervising teacher.

The challenges of this particular teaching scenario were compounded by the fact that the supervising teacher worked in close collaboration with another AP Literature teacher. Although this situation offered resources and benefits, it also made the situation more challenging in that I was required to match the pace of another veteran teacher.

The Effect of the AP Exam on Curriculum and Instruction

Good assessment informs instruction and assists a teacher not only in formatively understanding what knowledge students have of a subject, but how they learn best (Popham, 2002). This kind of assessment if done before, during, and after a unit ensures that instruction is best shaped to meet student needs. Teachers must choose assessments that best showcase student learning and reinforce the skills students need. AP classes are described less by specific “standards” than normal Florida curriculum, and more by some general guidelines offered by College Board in their course descriptions (College Board, 2004a). The design and content of the test are matched to these guidelines and shape classroom instruction.

During my internship, the supervising teacher wanted to allocate a reasonable amount of time for examining poetry, not only for the literary experience, but because poetry is a prevalent part of the multiple choice and essay portions of the AP exam. As such, some of our assessments would need to be geared towards developing skills that would help students do well on the test and familiarizing them with the format of test questions. This is the effect of instruction that is measured in a single test, limited in its ability help students experience literature due to the constraints of having to prepare for an important test.

Poetry Instruction

The question of how best to teach poetry to AP students is a problem because of differing viewpoints on what aspects of poetry should be emphasized (Couch, 1987; Dias & Hayhoe, 1988). I saw the value of teaching analysis, including terms, scansion,
forms and conventions, because knowledge of how a text is constructed supports a reading closer to the poet’s intent. However, I could not ignore the profundity of poetry’s impact on the students as people, and I valued their own responses and interpretations. How could their need for preparedness in dealing with the skill of analysis be reconciled with appreciation, developing respect and even enjoyment for poetry as an art form and as a means of deeply human communication?

The Efficacy of the Research

Lastly, would the data-gathering and analysis, as part of my research, reveal the impact of student gains, both in analytic skill in dealing with poetry and in terms of appreciation? Would this kind of teacher self-evaluation lend itself well to assessing my students’ progress and give me ideas for how better to teach poetry to such students next time? Positive answers to these questions were the aims of my study as I planned and implemented the unit, sincerely hoping that the analytic side of the study of poetry would not kill their motivation to study it, to become readers and appreciators of poetry. Part of the purpose of choosing to do action research for this thesis was that I would begin to see the importance of learning how to do research and engage in reflective practices for the sake of my students. If my classroom is truly to be student-centered, then the real measure of my effectiveness is whether students receive benefit from my time with them.

In the case of this research, I had not been teaching for very long, so the idea of planning a “change” (Section 2) was less applicable. Rather, the goal was to observe my own practice and evaluate the results of my lesson planning and instruction on students, interpreting results and proposing changes for the next time I teach.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to use action research examine my own teaching and practice during the time I was a student teacher, through the lens of a unit on poetry taught to a 12th grade AP Literature class. Situated in the educational dilemmas of assessment and accountability in the teaching of English Literature, by analyzing
student learning gains, I sought to explore the impact of my teaching poetry in an AP Literature class. This teacher action research project has implications for English teachers concerned with effectively preparing students for the AP exam, as well as for student growth in personal appreciation of poetry.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Situated in the following areas: teacher effectiveness, teacher action research, AP Literature classes, and instruction in poetry, this teacher action research study examined my effectiveness as a teacher of 12th grade AP Literature during a unit on poetry. Since this study concerned 12th grade students who chose to be in an Advanced Placement (AP) Literature and Composition class, it is important to review the background of the AP program, the content of the AP exam, and the College Board’s course recommendations, as well as the differing views on the efficacy of the program in terms of student learning.

Teacher Effectiveness

Beerens (2000) makes the bold statement that teachers are “the indispensable element in the school” (p. 6). He argues that dollar-for-dollar, money spent on quality instructors and their continuing professional development is the best money spent, although such spending is too often neglected. When asked, high school students report that what made a particular class “good” was the relative effectiveness of their instructor. But what qualities are being measured when we say that a teacher is “effective,” and who measures that effectiveness?

Stronge (2002) sums up many of the qualities of effective instruction in his discussion of the teacher’s commitment, classroom management, organization, lesson preparation, assessment skills, professionalism, and content knowledge, expanding on each comprehensively. This list echoes similar lists from Creemers (1994), who emphasizes questioning techniques, goal setting, and presentation skills. Other research on effectiveness focuses on the myriad individual facets of effectiveness, such as promoting a democratic learning environment (Finkel, 2000) and promoting experiential learning (Smith, 1998), but the basics of effectiveness are summed up in
Stronge’s list. However, the perception of teacher effectiveness is different, depending on which stakeholder is asked.

**Administrators**

Administrators are more directly affected by public accountability, represented by school boards and lawmakers (Beerens, 2000), and so must take into account how they will report that effectiveness to those stakeholders. Accountability must be demonstrated by learning gains that are in some way reportable to those who are not education professionals in today’s educational system, usually by standardized testing. Administrators also evaluate teachers and look for effectiveness because administrators care about the quality of instruction that their students are receiving, and they evaluate teachers in many of the same ways and for the same reasons teachers evaluate themselves.

Stronge (1997) recommends that teacher and school evaluation be both *outcome-oriented* and *improvement-oriented*, meaning that such evaluation is both formative and summative (Tucker & Kindred, 2000). Summative outcome-oriented evaluation is more easily reported to outside sources, while formative evaluation, performed internally by principals and administrators, helps the school and respective system demonstrate the process of growth as well as goal achievement. However, because principals’ visits, conducted in environments frequently altered by their presence (the observer’s paradox), may be infrequent and only offer a snapshot of the instructor and learning environment, other factors of teacher effectiveness may be missed.

**Parents**

Another set of important stakeholders in teacher effectiveness is the individual student’s parents. Epstein (as in Stronge & Ostrander, 1997) cites parent knowledge of how well the teacher interacts with student and family, the appropriateness of out-of-class assignments, and how the teacher inspires the student to work outside the school’s learning environment, as valued by parents. Parents may also know more about whether the teacher went the extra mile as far as providing help beyond normal instructional time (Stronge & Ostrander, 1997). All of these factors are important in terms of evaluating teachers formatively—how do teachers get the results that they do? Parents also help to reinforce the goals set for students by teachers in terms of out-of-class instructional time, and so they are valuable collaborators in education (Becher, as in Stronge & Ostrander, 1997).
Students

A voice often overlooked in the evaluation of teacher effectiveness is that of the student. Perhaps this is because students cannot yet vote or because they are far too subjective in their opinions of effective teaching. Students, however subjective they are, also seem to have well-developed opinions on what makes a “good” teacher. Batten, Marland and Khamis’s survey of several Australian schools (1993) revealed a remarkable consistency in which teachers were considered good, with students’ comments on “what was good” being grouped into the areas of teaching and learning, attitude towards students, and classroom management. This survey of a thousand students revealed a good teacher as one who:

- Helps you with your work;
- Explains well so you can understand;
- Is friendly, easy to get along with, doesn’t yell at you;
- Makes lessons interesting and enjoyable;
- Cares about you, is always ready to listen to you, understands them;
- Has a sense of humor, will have a laugh with you;
- Controls the class (p. 15).

Similar studies (Brown & McIntyre, as in Batten, Marland & Khamis, 1993) revealed similar outcomes, corroborating these student comments and ideals closely. Larson and Follman (both separately, in Stronge & Ostrander, 2000) support the idea that student feedback on teacher effectiveness is reliable over time. Student data cannot merely be treated as a popularity contest, nor can the quality of interpersonal skills be underrated in terms of effectiveness in teachers. Teachers who know how to motivate, inspire, and get along with students will have higher learning gains by virtue of that good relationship. One of the students at Chiles High School with whom I spoke indicated that she was planning on taking higher-level classes and challenging herself in a subject area that was not her strongest, just because she thought the teacher who was teaching that class was a “good” teacher. It is one of the high marks of No Child Left Behind that even students who are more challenging to work with must still have their needs addressed in a teacher’s instruction, that student needs edge closer to public consideration than they have been, in comparison to the standards set. Much can be gathered about teacher effectiveness, and student motivation to work for a given teacher, through student voices (Beerens, 2000; Baines & Stanley, 2003).
Teacher Self-Evaluation

Reform in education is often looked at from the top down (Milner, as in Airasian & Gullickson, 1997), following results of standardized tests and other summative evaluations, and such is the case with No Child Left Behind. Teacher effectiveness can be considered from the perspective of administrators, parents, and students, but teacher self-evaluation is a key vantage point for defining teacher effectiveness. Teacher self-evaluation allows for a grassroots approach to reform, as teachers speak up and share what works well in their classrooms (Glickman, as in Airasian & Gullickson, 1997). Self-evaluation is research done from the inside out, as opposed to the research conducted in the classroom by educational “experts” from the outside. Airasian and Gullickson (1997) list eight reasons that self-evaluation is important in terms of effectiveness:

1. It is a professional responsibility.
2. It focuses professional development and improvement on the classroom or school level where teachers have their greatest expertise and effect.
3. It recognizes that organizational change is usually the result of individuals changing themselves and their personal practices, not of “top-down” mandates.
4. It gives teachers voice— that is, a stake in and control over their own practice.
5. It makes teachers aware of the strengths and weaknesses of their practice; it grows from the immediacy and complexity of the classroom, as do teachers’ motives and incentives.
6. It encourages ongoing teacher development and discourages unchanging classroom beliefs, routine, and methods.
7. It treats the teacher as a professional and can improve teacher morale and motivation.
8. It encourages collegial interactions and discussions about teaching (p. 219).

Teachers notice things about their own teaching that no one else would, and no one knows how students perform in a class as well as teachers do, because they have a higher degree of access to different forms of assessment and evaluation of student learning.

According to Milner and Milner (2003), self-evaluation is a means of professional growth, and growth is necessary if a teacher is to improve lessons, assessments, delivery of information, facilitation of instruction, etc. The point is one of continuous growth, like the well-worn adage that distinguishes “the teacher who has twenty years
of experience [from] the teacher who has one year of experience twenty times” (Milner & Milner, p. 431). In other words, teachers must learn from classroom experiences as much as students in order to improve and offer students the very best quality instruction.

Researchers discuss many aspects of self-evaluation, from portfolios (Beerens, 2000; Milner & Milner, 2003) to checklists (Airasian & Gullickson, 1997), but the method of self-evaluation I have chosen to use in this study is teacher action research.

**Teacher Action Research**

Teacher action research is well-defined by Macintyre as “an investigation, where, as a result of rigorous self-appraisal of current practice, the researcher focuses on a ‘problem’ … and on the basis of information… plans, implements, then evaluates an action then draws conclusion on the basis of findings” (as in Macintyre, 2000, p. 1). This research, a form of teacher self-evaluation, is particularly useful because it provides reportable data to stakeholders, allows teachers to contribute to the knowledge base that underpins their profession, and supplies data. As Sagor (1992) admonishes, “He who controls the data controls the agenda” (p.5).

What distinguishes teacher action research from other forms of inquiry, according to Rogers (2004), is that it is intentional in its effort to examine a problem and that it is designed by teachers themselves. It is also public in terms of its audience, with plans of sharing results with others. In addition, it should be voluntary in the sense that this sort of public self-examination carries the risk of vulnerability. Teacher action research, unlike some other public forms of inquiry, is a method chosen by the teacher. Likewise, it is ethical in its realization that student privacy is a right that students have which should not be compromised by the need for research. Teacher action research takes steps to safeguard students’ rights. Finally, and perhaps mostvaluably, it describes well the context of learning, instead of trying to control variables. It is dependent on its context to reveal the problem and observations, relevant to its context because it directly pertains to a real classroom environment, and responsive to its context, as it presents solutions and suggestions for learning environments (Sagor, 1992).
English teachers in particular bring skill to teacher action research because they are in the business of teaching “awareness of language and self-consciousness about the human condition” (Milner & Milner, 2003, p. 435). When this awareness is turned to their own practice, teachers can often draw conclusions that help them to grow as teachers.

So what does teacher action research look like? First, the researcher must realize something that needs to be studied and find a “wondering to pursue” (Bissex & Bullock, as in Five, 1986, p. 44). Wells (1994) suggests four basic steps that take place during research once a problem has been noted:

1. **Observe** relevant aspects of the situation as it occurs in the learning context.
2. **Interpret** observations in order to understand why things are happening the way that they are. What things work well, and which do not?
3. **Plan a change** based on interpretations in which the problem is addressed in a new way.
4. **Act** and put the planned change into action (p. 26).

As mentioned in the discussion of teacher effectiveness, teacher action research is one way that teachers can gauge this for themselves and add their voices and data to educational reform from the bottom up. Sagor (1992) reminds us that educators are more potentially isolated from their fellows than doctors, lawyers, and other professional jobs, spending more time interacting with clients than their coworkers. Teacher action research is another way for teachers to grow and share their growth with others, opening the lines of communication in what can be a very lonely field.

**Advanced Placement Literature and Composition**

The AP Program, according to College Board official (and incidentally, the primary compiler of one of the anthologies used in the teaching of the poetry unit in this study) Robert DiYanni (2002), had its humble beginnings at Kenyon College in 1951. There, faculty met and discussed how to allow students of high standing to work towards a liberal arts degree prior to high school graduation.

The committee agreed that “able students” were not well served by high school curriculum, and that the best place for them to be challenged by advanced liberal arts
curriculum was in secondary schools, with secondary school teachers (Cornog, as in DiYanni, 2002). Exams were developed with the assistance of the Educational Testing Service (ETS) during the 1953-54 school year for English composition, literature, Latin, French, German, Spanish, mathematics, biology, chemistry, and physics. The ETS also administered the tests, which lasted three hours each. First administered at colleges who hosted the high schoolers in 1954, the exams were scored by committees of readers, as they are today. Using a five-point scale, scores were then compared with the scores of college freshmen taking equivalent courses (Holladay, 1989; Iorio, 1989; DiYanni, 2002).

AP classes and their accompanying tests gained popularity through the succeeding decades and early on, their direction was charted by the College Entrance Examination Board (CEEB or “College Board”), who worked closely with ETS. The latter was promoter of the fledgling branch of psychology known as “psychometrics,” or the analysis and measurement (pioneered by Binet and Spearman) of human characteristics such as intelligence. Journals praised the AP program for producing “desirable improvements and a balance of opportunities” (Valentine, as in DiYanni, 2002) for young people, and admissions officers lauded the curricular changes that College Board was able to promote through the AP Program (DiYanni, 2002).

Along with the willingness of students to be challenged, DiYanni cites the commitment of the College Board, secondary teachers, and universities primarily for the success. The success was commensurate with colleges and universities who began to accept “AP credit,” (typically with a score of “3” or higher) and an increasing number of schools and students who offered and took the classes. Even greater growth occurred in the 1980’s and 1990’s as state and federal government began to offer large and small grants promoting growth of schools’ AP programs and exam fees. Now, over forty years later, with pre-AP materials being distributed to schools and high correlation between student performance in college and high AP scores, it appears that AP is truly “here to stay” (Rothschild, as in DiYanni, 2002). Jones (2001) estimates that two-thirds of high schools in the U.S. offer at least one AP course, and that in the year 2000, over 300,000 students took the exams. Some of those tests also come from international sources, as the AP went international in the late 1980’s (DiYanni, 2003).
Exam Format and Contents

Over the years, the AP Literature and Composition test has retained its three-hour length, comprised of a sixty-minute multiple-choice section and a one-hundred-twenty-minute essay section (College Board, 2004a). Approximately fifty multiple-choice questions are given, based on passages that are included in the test booklet. The ratio of questions per passage varies, but averages between seven and ten. There are three essay questions, each given forty minutes for response, and each of these is scored on a nine-point scale. Typically, one is based on a prose passage, one on a sample of poetry, and one a more open-ended prompt, in which the student’s choice of a “work of literary merit” is examined in light of a literary question. Performance on the multiple-choice section comprises 45% of the final score, while the essay portion is 55%. The students’ scores are then compared with each other, based on a “raw” number of points accrued, and thus are norm-referenced. The percentages of “5’s,” “4’s,” “3’s,” etc. are determined before the exams are graded (James, as in Vopat, 1989). Students are scored on the five-point rubric, with “5” being “extremely well-qualified” and so on.

AP Course Content

The content of the AP Literature class is determined by individual schools and teachers, although the College Board offers its own guiding principles and considerations in their Course Description (2004a). Although freshman composition classes often emphasize modes of discourse other than “expository, analytical, and argumentative writing that forms the basis of academic and professional communication” (2004a, p. 7), a fact to which the College Board readily admits, AP is designed to meet the needs of students who will need to communicate well in the aforementioned modes as they write for their content area. And although the College Board recommends process-based writing, the examination offers opportunities for timed writing only. AP standards assume that students already have a fair command of “standard” English mechanics and usage and so focuses on stylistic elements such as:

• a wide-ranging vocabulary used appropriately and effectively;
• a variety of sentence structures, including appropriate use of subordination and coordination;
• a logical organization, enhanced by specific techniques to increase coherence, such as repetition, transitions, and emphasis;
• a balance of generalization and specific illustrative detail; and
• an effective use of rhetoric, including controlling tone, establishing and maintaining voice, and achieving appropriate emphasis through diction and sentence structure (p. 9).
Likewise, instead of specific course criteria, the College Board offers these suggestions as overarching goals:
Upon completing the Language and Composition course, then, students should be able to:
• analyze and interpret samples of good writing, identifying and explaining an author’s use of rhetorical strategies and techniques;
• apply effective strategies and techniques in their own writing;
• create and sustain arguments based on readings, research, and/or personal experience;
• demonstrate understanding and mastery of standard written English as well as stylistic maturity in their own writings;
• write in a variety of genres and contexts, both formal and informal, employing appropriate conventions;
• produce expository and argumentative compositions that introduce a complex central idea and develop it with appropriate, specific evidence, cogent explanations, and clear transitions; and
• move effectively through the stages of the writing process, with careful attention to inquiry and research, drafting, revising, editing, and review (p. 9).
These guidelines offer a list of skills that students should be able to develop if they are to succeed on the AP examination. The exam is the College Board’s sole method of “quality control” for AP programs at the school level, but one of the main concerns of the AP student, passing the test and getting the college credit (or using the scores as leverage in the game of acceptance into their universities of choice) looms large and ensures that these skills are addressed in each classroom. The high stakes of the test direct classroom content, at least to a degree.
Support for AP’s

Education professionals who support standardized testing as the primary means of upholding educational standards and those within the ranks of the College Board praise the AP Program for its integrity and focus on vital skills (Hanson, as in Kanzler, 1989; Reising, 1994). AP Exam questions are constantly field-tested with college freshmen to ensure that questions are both suitable and comparable. The 1-to-5 score cutoffs correspond with those college freshmen who received the letter grades that best match those levels of performance, a “5” matching the score of freshmen who took the same test and received an “A” in the course. The “4’s” were “B’s” and so on (DiYanni, 2002).

One reviewer, after participating as a scorer in reading a set of exams, called the scoring process “uncommonly enjoyable and successful” (Reising, 1994). He stresses reliability, calling the process “if not flawless, laudable” and continuing, “on the night of Thursday, June 16, thousands of adolescents in a variety of nations had good reason to sleep comfortably, certain that their attempts at exegesis on English prose and poetry had received ‘a fair shake’” (p. 309). Administrators applaud the fact that AP offers a kind of universal standard, with all schools’ students taking the same exam and being judged by the same criteria. This provides the opportunity for bragging rights if their school performs well, indicating that the teachers at their school prepared them well. AP is particularly attractive to college-track students who want a challenge, and to senior teachers who are better qualified to teach them. Finally, the College Board and ETS profit greatly from the classes financially, as the AP’s become more desirable in terms of college entrance. Students who have taken AP’s demonstrate that they are ready for the rigors of college curricula, and as was stated earlier, there is a high correlation of high AP scores and solid performance in university classes (Foster, 1989).

Criticism

Not everyone who considers the effects of AP’s sees the benefits alone. Critique of AP classes and exams can be summarized in three basic categories: problems with the
ETS/College Board, problems with the content of the exam, and problems with the way classes are taught.

First, the College Board and ETS are the owners of the SAT (originally an acronym for “Scholastic Aptitude Test”) and AP, giving them an unusually large gatekeeping function in college entrance. The ACT test (named after its parent company, American College Testing, Inc.) is another option for college entrance, though it is not as widely accepted as the SAT. International Baccalaureate (IB) programs are cropping up as rivals to the AP systems, but have fewer validity studies accorded them than do AP’s. Owen calls ETS/College Board an “unregulated monopoly” (as in Vopat, 1989, p. 53) young people headed into many different walks of life must pass through the gates they keep. Cultural and gender biases in the construction of the exam are also among the criticisms of ETS/College Board (Vopat, 1989). The College Board has a considerable influence on who gets into universities, and therefore indirect influence on much financial aid, including the National Merit program.

By far, the most common criticism of the exam is its approach to literature and composition. AP’s approach to literature, as found on the multiple-choice section, is to ask interpretive questions with one “right” answer. Although critics of the exam do not propose that “anything goes” in the hermeneutics of literature, the idea that literary questions, even questions about technique have one “best” (and notably, their) answer is an incomplete view of why people study literature (Markham, 2001). This criticism especially comes from National Council of the Teachers of English (NCTE) members, influenced by Reader Response criticism (Vopat, 1989; Jones, 2001; Markham, 2001; Metzger, 2002; and Milner and Milner, 2003).

**Reader Response Criticism**

Reader Response criticism values the role of the Reader. Readers bring to the text their own reaction to the literature as much as anything the text purportedly “says” (Dias & Hayhoe, 1988; Rosenblatt, 1995). Critics characterize the AP exam as having a view rooted in New Criticism, which Dias and Hayhoe describe as “close reading of poems as self-sufficient wholes… deriving interpretations that could be supported by the text without adverting to readers’ responses or to… extraneous information” (1988, p. 8). Critics claim that the questions dismiss the natural ambiguity of language and texts (Markham, 2001), and that analytical skills are only part of a reader’s aim in approaching a text (Jones, 2001). Metzger states it clearly when discussing Shakespeare
and the AP, “Multiple choice questions and forty minute essays, while useful as a measure of some ends, work as ends against the very consciousness of language and its power to shape human understanding…” (2002, p. 24). If the study of literary texts is merely a study of technique and an opportunity to practice analytical skills, then the texts themselves become arbitrary and the value that they have to us as humans, communicating across the straits of time, is lost.

**Composition**

Although critics acknowledge the worthwhile pursuit of expository, analytical, and even *timed* writing, as it prepares students well for university in-class examinations and research papers, they also suggest that the writing portion of the test has a product-over-process approach to composition (Holladay, 1989; Jones, 2001; Metzger, 2002 and Milner & Milner, 2003). Such critics state that the exam does not measure the writing process, and indeed AP publications do not deny this. According to the College Board, “Although these extended, revised essays cannot be part of the AP Examination, the experience of writing them will help make students more self-aware and flexible writers and thus may help their performance on the exam itself” (2004a, p. 8). Elbow (as in Jones, 2001) believes that ETS/College Board could instead accept portfolios in order to better demonstrate a student’s progress and the writing process. Compositional skills, critics believe, could be better taught if the test reflected these abilities.

**Effects of AP on Teaching and Learning**

The tendency towards a test-driven mindset is present in students and teachers alike when the stakes are as high as they are with AP’s. One of Vopat’s (1989) main concerns is the potential for “coaching” instead of teaching, when the stakes are high. Economically, students are told they could save a potential year’s worth of tuition through performance on the AP’s. Because of AP’s wide acceptance, this is quite an incentive.

**Standardization and “Gatekeeping”**

For teachers and schools, high AP scores are a desirable way to “sell” one’s school in the age of school choice. This may present a lack of opportunity for some students in schools that are more highly selective (another possible “gatekeeping” function of the exam) when signing students up for AP classes. While different schools have different positions on entrance into their AP programs, high performance on exams is sometimes economically rewarded with bonuses for schools and teachers.
And like many standardized exams, the teacher’s performance is called into question when students do not perform well on the exam (Popham, 2003). Jago states that the best predictor of students graduating from college is not SAT scores, but the quality of the secondary school curriculum that is offered them. She suggests that students who finish a math course beyond Algebra 2, “more than [double] the odds” (2000, p. 66) that they will graduate from college with a Bachelor’s Degree. Many secondary schools, she argues, do not have the funds to allocate to upper-level classes that would be de rigeur for most college-bound schools. This includes AP’s, which now register with college admissions boards for admissions and scholarships. Hence, some students are disadvantaged by their schools’ curricular offerings (Vopat, 1989), though to its credit, the federal government has, as recently as 2002, allocated $20 million to states for the exam fees of low-income students (DiYanni, 2002).

Considering the background, construction, implementation and issues surrounding AP courses and exams, it becomes clear that the AP Literature and Composition exam, although well-established as a standardized test with a high degree of validity in its ability to predict how secondary students would have done in a freshman composition class, receives mixed reviews by educators in terms of the means it uses to accomplish its aims.

**Poetry Instruction**

We don’t read and write poetry because it's cute. We read and write poetry because we are members of the human race. And the human race is filled with passion. Medicine, law, business, engineering, these are all noble pursuits, and necessary to sustain life. But poetry, beauty, romance, love, these are what we stay alive for. – Mr. Keating in *Dead Poets Society* (Haft, Junger Witt, Thomas, Weir & Schulman, 1989)

By now a classic among educators, the film *Dead Poets Society*, starring Robin Williams, depicts the story of John Keating, an English teacher in the Northeastern U.S. who has returned to his alma mater, a college preparatory school, to teach. The curriculum is a seemingly centuries-old anthology that appears to have been compiled
solely to pass on old interpretations of old literature. During his second class, Keating has his students read the introduction to the anthology aloud. Written by a stuffy-sounding J. Evans Pritchard, PhD, he introduction offers a simple formula:

To fully understand poetry, we must first be fluent with its meter, rhyme, and figures of speech. Then ask two questions: One, how artfully has the objective of the poem been rendered, and two, how important is that objective. Question one rates the poem's perfection, question two rates its importance. And once these questions have been answered, determining a poem's greatness becomes a relatively simple matter (Haft et al., 1989).

Keating quickly pronounces the introduction “excrement,” and he demands that the students rip the page out of the book and deposit it in the wastebasket.

The “war” that Keating declares on Pritchard and his “armies… measuring poetry” is an oversimplified illustration of the struggle between Reader Response and New Critical theorists for control of the method of teaching poetry in the classroom, at least from the Reader Response perspective. Do we study poetry under a microscope, analyzing its parts, or do we savor it, and as Keating says, “let it drip like honey from our tongues”? The responsible AP instructor aims for a balance between the analytical skills measured on the AP exam and the enjoyment and zest for life that poetry can promote in the classroom.

Analysis and the New Critical Approach

The good news is that many of the best anthologies or poetry textbooks do not smack of the pomposity of Dr. Pritchard. Most traditional texts in use are characterized by a vibrant love of poetry and many are written by poets. Kennedy and Gioia’s An Introduction to Poetry (1994), now in its 10th edition, begins with an excellent defense of analysis. They offer the view that poetry is an experience so holy that analyzing a poem could be as heartless as dissecting a hummingbird, and then counter that we may indeed study a hummingbird in flight. The risk of a “poem dying from observation is not nearly so great as not seeing it at all” (Kennedy & Gioia, p. xix-xx). Perrine’s Sound and Sense (Arp, 1997), the classic text I used in this teacher action research study of a 12th grade class, offers a discussion of how poetry is the language of experience. “We all have a need to live more deeply and fully and with greater awareness…” (p. 4). These writers begin to sound more like Mr. Keating than Dr. Pritchard!
Anthologies are often written point for point on various literary techniques, with chapters on figurative language, tone, form, and other terms that resemble questions from an AP prompt. Kreuzer, in his book *Elements of Poetry*, defends analysis by calling it an “awareness” (1962, p. 3) with which to see the world more clearly. This is the intent of these text/anthologies, to present poetry by looking at techniques which make us more aware of what a poem is saying to us, coloring our response to it.

In contrast, our Barron’s AP preparation book offered lists of terms, and explications of poems with much less art than Perrine. This was poetry dissection in its purest form, judging the whole by examining its parts. The New Critical texts offered analysis and, excepting the Barron’s guide, which was meant more as a test-busting set of exercises, shared a genuine love and fascination with poetry with their Reader Response brethren, and truly seemed to “respond” to poetry themselves!

**The Valued Reader: Reader Response Views**

Many of the Reader Response articles and books dedicated to the pedagogy of poetry begin by describing the animosity that seems to exist between secondary students and poetry (Couch, 1987; Bujega, 1992; Lockward, 1994; Barton, 2002). O’Brien (1985) titles the second chapter of her book about teaching poetry in the secondary school, “I, too, dislike it,” after Marianne Moore’s opening line to her “Poem.” Most blame the over-analysis of poetry in classrooms by teachers, and a lack of attention to the most basic powers of language to stir us (Frye, as in Bujega, 1992). Barton found that his creative writing class showed few gains in their writing until he began to emphasize the value of individual words, then move up in complexity from there. Bujega makes the point that most students will not grow up to be critics, and when they find that they are not the expert exegetes we have attempted to train them to be, students will reject poetry altogether.

Reader Response critics value teaching poetry by having students experience the power of its language, or by letting student response become inspiration. As such, more articles and books tend towards teaching poetry writing, as in Geof Hewitt’s *Today You are My Favorite Poet* (1998), or for middle schoolers, Peter Sears’ *Gonna Bake Me a Rainbow Poem* (1990). Other articles are written about the power of hearing poetry read (Lockward, 1994). Kammer (2002) describes a unit he and his department created that culminated in a “poetry slam.”

The idea that a personal connection with poetry helps to sustain students’ interest
in poems, long after hearing Shel Silverstein read aloud in elementary and middle school, is important to the motivational aims of teachers. It is also important for students to see poems as something more than just organisms they must study in order to pass the AP exam, and for them to have real experiences with poems, thereby making them lifelong poetry readers. O’Brien says that we must “create conditions in which delight [in poems] can happen” (1985, p. 4), while Milner and Milner contend that we must offer experiences with poetry that “welcome” (2003, p. 151) students across the threshold. Most of all, poetry must be taught by first encouraging students to interpret, before the teacher’s interpretation; Dias and Hayhoe call the poetry discussion-leading teacher the “latecomer” (1988, p. 106), who offers other possible interpretations after students have occupied the “middle ground” with their ideas, not offering correction as much as further probing into students’ understanding.

Common Ground

On both sides of the Reader Response/New Criticism argument for teaching poetry is a common belief in the value of poetry in society. Britton (1966) states that the skill of seeing multiple dimensions in verse and interpreting poetry in varying ways encourages us as a society to be able to see a resolution to problems in which both sides must be examined, encouraging feelings that affect the behavior of an individual. This relates to Rosenblatt’s idea that response to literature can effect a positive change on society (1995). Kreuzer’s analytical “awareness” and Milner and Milner’s “welcome” to a personal response in students must coexist as a balance in order for students to find this value for themselves. In an AP class, it means students enjoy and appreciate poetry because they are invited to connect with it personally, and are given enough practice developing analytical skills that they feel comfortable looking at the text up close as well.

Final Comments

This study, which took place in my 12th grade AP Literature and Composition class, is an example of how teacher action research, as discussed in the literature, can be used to measure teacher effectiveness through analysis of student learning gains. These measurements and gains can be used to positively influence student learning in similar
classrooms, as well as my future students, for whose benefit the study was conducted. The teaching of poetry in this study drew on the strengths of the New Critical/Reader Response positions and hopefully assisted not only in gains in student skills, but also gains in student appreciation for poetry.
CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Introduction

During the spring of 2004, I began my student teaching semester at Lawton Chiles High School, teaching several 12th grade AP Literature and Composition classes. I determined that I would research the effectiveness of my own practice as a budding teacher by examining the results of my work. A poetry unit was selected for the study for two reasons: 1) because of poetry’s relative frequency on the multiple choice and essay sections of the AP exam, and 2) because poetry is an art form which pushes us to be what Wallace Stevens calls “priest[s] of the invisible” (as in Milner & Milner, p. 184), communicating those seemingly inexplicable fragments of life we cannot get across through prose.

In order to investigate my effectiveness, I decided to consider the outcomes of my instruction, specifically by measuring student learning gains. If I were teaching my students effectively, the gains would demonstrate that fact. Although I had observed the classes several months prior to the internship, the poetry unit taught and described in this report was the first unit for which I had assumed control of the class.

Context of the Study

To contextualize the story of my study, in this chapter I describe the setting in detail, as well as offer a look into what my instructional time was like. What follows is a description of the learning context, procedures used during the unit, and research methodology.

School Zone/Demographics

Lawton Chiles High School is Leon County’s newest high school, and culls students from areas that previously belonged to Leon and Lincoln High School zones.
The area encompasses much of northern Leon County, stretching out to the Georgia border at its northernmost point, to Gadsden County and the Lake Jackson area to the west. To the south, Chiles’ zone meets Leon’s and Lincoln’s, ending just above the Killearn neighborhood. The border continues to the east and runs between Miccosukee and Centerville Roads (Tallahassee-Leon County GIS, 2001).

The School Public Accountability Report (SPAR) reveals some information about the ethnic composition of the student body, which is 84.9% Caucasian, 9.7% African-American, 2.1% Hispanic, 2.6% Asian, .2% Native American and .6% multiracial. Chiles High School has a greater percentage of Caucasian students than any other school in Leon County, compared to the district average (54.1%). While it weighs in as average in terms of other ethnic groups, it has a disproportionately small number of African American students, in comparison to the district average (39.6%). A casual walk through Chiles’ hallways and outside walkways makes these percentages real; the student body is predominantly white, representative of the north side neighborhoods served (Leon County Schools, 2003).

Chiles High School also has a lower percentage of economically disadvantaged students (1.5%) than the district average (32.6%). Chiles is a new school with new facilities and students who attend come from families that are wealthier than the average.

**Neighborhood**

Chiles High School is located near the intersection of Thomasville Road, Bradfordville Road, and Bannerman Road, and is one of the last large structures between that intersection and Thomasville, Georgia. The school is situated in the hilly and largely undeveloped pine forests of northern Leon County, on the west side of Thomasville Road. On the northern side, large antebellum plantations stretch into the area known by geographers as the Red Hills Region, due to its large deposits of red clay. This wooded terrain even suggests the name of Chiles’ mascot, the Timber Wolf.

The community surrounding Chiles, known as Bradfordville, offers a lovely setting and is relatively quiet in comparison with the downtown bustle. The nearest residences are found in the Deerlake/Kinhega area, which is outlined by Deerlake Circle and characterized by a maze of smaller streets. This heavily wooded neighborhood ranges from middle- to upper-class homes with lots characterized by rolling terrain and a “secluded” feeling, even when homes are not so far apart. In this
way, Chiles is also a reflection of the community it serves, offering a feeling of seclusion from surrounding businesses and homes.

The closest commercial areas are small shopping centers just south of the school on Thomasville Road. A Publix Super Market and a Subway are the few businesses offering food for upperclassmen’s off-campus lunches. Other than a few gas stations and small shops, the Bradfordville area is less developed than Killearn, which is just south of it. Just north of the school is local ABC television affiliate WTXL, Channel 27, one of three television stations that serve the state capital and the surrounding region. The distance from many professional businesses makes frequent car travel a necessity for the students in engaged in Externship classes, part of the population reported in this study.

Physical Description of Chiles High School

Cars line up along the small service roads that lead to Chiles in the morning, representing students who do not yet have parking spaces of their own. Other than this vehicular armada, the first thing a visitor notes is the newness of the campus; the brick in the buildings retains crisp edges and sidewalks are as clean and white as a fresh sheet of paper. The athletic fields are characterized by grass that is just losing the “seam” of sod laid at Chiles’ construction. The school, completed in the last five years, is on its third graduating class as of this writing. For the teachers as well as the students, Chiles is a new beginning and a chance for them to excel and learn in a new setting; the phrase “building traditions” appears often in Chiles brochures, indicating this sentiment.

The layout of Chiles, instead of borrowing from the “classic” look of Leon High, with its expansive single edifice, is a series of buildings connected by walkways. One of the striking features of these two-story buildings is the network of second-story walkways that connect them. Students file across these terraces between classes, their traffic moving above classmates on the ground level in streams like multilevel freeways. Each level of the buildings has a hall with lockers, and most programs are grouped together; for instance, the English department is housed in Building Seven, and is mostly on the first floor. Students are not allowed in these buildings when teachers are not present. A red sign, “Hallway should be empty until 8:30,” is just outside the door that leads to the first floor hallway housing the English Department.

The main office is located in the front, and is the first building a visitor reaches after parking in the visitor parking lot. The administrative offices all spin off of a central
room which houses the front desk. Just outside the front door, on the opposite side of
the walkway, is the 400-seat Chiles auditorium, used for pep rallies, theater
productions, and various class division meetings (such as the senior class meeting to
hear a presentation on graduation announcements). Behind the administration building
is a cluster of portables, constructed to meet the already growing demand for class
space. Considering the recent construction of the school, this is also a reflection of the
growth of the community within Chiles’ school zone.

The Information Resource Center (most definitely not referred to as a “library”
by administration) is the crowning jewel of Chiles’ property. In a central location, the
“IRC,” as it is called, boasts a hub-like main desk and an expanse of computers in small
surrounding clusters. Truly constructed with technology in mind, the IRC also offers
digital cameras for on-campus use by students, as well as traditional print materials.
The computers boast an array of software from word-processing to SAT prep, and their
sheer number recalls the availability of technology in the libraries of “well-connected”
nearby Florida State University. Media specialists are on hand at the round main desk
with their staff to assist students in research and information gathering.

As a result, classes like AP English are able to do background research on a novel
or play they may be reading for class. Students are often required to give presentations
based on their findings. The IRC is a reflection of both the newness of the school and
the relative affluence of the school zone. In many ways, the IRC and the rest of the
Chiles property facilitate learning and community. The facilities are true assets to
teachers and students trying to live out the Chiles motto, cognosco, duco, perficio (“I learn,
I lead, I achieve”), in their common pursuit of quality education.

Mrs. Jan Dunlap’s Classroom

Mrs. Dunlap’s classroom, Room 7103, is the expression of an experienced teacher
who has grown and adapted with the times. One of two classes connected by a common
office (shared by Mrs. Dunlap and the department head, Mrs. Linda Clark), the size of
the room offers teacher and students a comfortable amount of space. A “new” smell
still lingers in the air, a reminder of the recent construction of the school,
complementing the classic literature at home on the class bookshelves.

The far wall of the room features a long window permitting a view of the grassy
space between buildings. Next to the window is the teacher’s desk. Markerboards with
assignments listed for her AP Literature and Externship classes cover the front and back
walls of the classroom. On the wall opposing the window, Mrs. Dunlap’s files and books are kept in order by a long desk/shelving unit. Workspace for her teacher’s aides can be found at a desk by the front markerboard and the desk/shelving unit.

Mrs. Dunlap’s classroom offers some indications of her personality and teaching philosophy. Two posters of timberwolves on opposing walls signify Mrs. Dunlap’s school spirit, and the list of wise maxims by her markerboard characterize her caring yet common-sense approach to teaching. The poster-sized copy of William Blake’s “The Chimney Sweeper” next to a new TV/VCR combo unit mounted on a positionable metal arm emphasize the comfortable balance of classic instruction with new ideas and technology.

The setup of the desks is a “V” shape with an aisle in the middle that points towards the teacher’s podium. This setup focuses towards the teacher but allows students to see each other during a discussion. Also, students can easily witness presentations or dramatic readings, as is the case when the AP classes read Shakespeare aloud (characters “onstage” meet at the front of the class to read).

**The Teacher**

Mrs. Dunlap has been teaching in the Leon County school system for twenty-four years, but she chose to come to Chiles High School at its inception because she saw the opportunity to help forge a program which would meet students’ needs better than other schools at which she had been teaching. She had worked closely with Mrs. Clark previously and helped Mrs. Clark to convince other able teachers that Chiles would be a great place for their contributions. She is a very excited senior sponsor, aiding them in the all-important process of high school graduation. This is a very appropriate role for the friendly and encouraging, yet professional Mrs. Dunlap. She keeps up with the students’ lives, aware of when one is absent or ill, or when the golf team does well. This tapping into student lives is part of her teaching too, as typified by her ability to “translate” Shakespeare into modern ideas without “dumbing it down.” She makes literature accessible.

Mrs. Dunlap varies the activities she and the students work on each day, and she always begins by announcing the day’s agenda. Sometimes class is delayed by a few minutes because students are gathered around her, discussing their externship placements or talking about graduation or student government. She is available to her students, with a hint of motherliness in her interactions with them. Excess talking, once
she begins her lesson, is usually curbed by her saying, “Now we’re going to switch gears,” or “Now we’re focusing.” Remarks that are off-topic she redirects or ignores. For a classroom that is as interactive as hers is (no hand-raising necessary!), she maintains an orderly space where everyone shares opinions safely.

Mrs. Dunlap’s teaching style is based primarily on interactive lecture, but she incorporates student viewpoints whenever possible. In her AP Literature classes, she often has students do summaries of chapters, characters, or themes and present them for the class, so that they are constructing the knowledge base together. Insomuch as she encourages discussion, Mrs. Dunlap says it is not her policy to make every individual contribute to a class discussion. She feels that some learn better just by listening, and prodding the quiet students can sometimes cause resentment. As their teacher, Mrs. Dunlap adds to and directs student contributions. Her assistance in establishing background information on troublesome passages or synopsizing when necessary, enables students to make inferences on their own.

Mrs. Dunlap’s style suits her classroom configuration; it is not full round-table discussion as a circle of desks might offer or a strict set of rows that would facilitate straight lectures where the teacher is the only source of knowledge. Students’ ideas and contributions are taken seriously in her classroom, but the teacher provides clear direction for each class. Again, Mrs. Dunlap combines the best parts of informative lecture with a constructivist philosophy, allowing students to learn by developing their own set of literary “lenses.”

Her assessments work in similar fashion. Some are aimed at the rigorous requirements of the AP exams constantly anticipated in late spring, and so reflect the difficult multiple choice and essay questions students will encounter on that fateful day in May. Hence, her evaluations of those assignments must reflect the evaluations of the AP graders. However, other projects enable students to be creative. One student, for example, made a cake representative of the witches’ cauldron in Macbeth, replete with pretzels for wooden fire logs, green-tinted marshmallows for the bubbling brew, and “circus peanuts” (candy) as fingers. Student creativity is also represented in class presentations, offering students an opportunity to make memorable connections for their classmates, as well as entertain them. The variety of assessments allows students to best showcase their knowledge. Mrs. Dunlap is an experienced teacher who tries to bring the best out of each student.
The Students

Mrs. Dunlap taught two types of classes during the 2003-04 school year: Externship and AP Literature. Mrs. Dunlap’s Externship classes were comprised of students of similar abilities (many are in both classes). All were highly motivated students who applied to do the externship through Chiles because they had interest in a professional field. The externship program paired these students with professionals in their community whose job interested them and allowed them to work alongside them for part of their school day. During the second half of her day, Mrs. Dunlap was busy working with these students, observing them at their places of business and coordinating the many facets of the program.

The externship required the students to make presentations on their profession, read professional literature, and keep journals of what they are learning. This sort of active learning is found in all of Mrs. Dunlap’s classes, and students have to be prepared to invest themselves in their learning, not just to passively receive knowledge so they can pass a test.

Following a 1st period planning time, she taught three sections of AP Literature. Generally, these AP students were highly motivated to surpass graduation requirements and presented few discipline problems.

My study was conducted in her 3rd period class, the second of three sections of AP Literature. This class was characterized by its small size, at twenty-two students, and its fun-loving nature. These students were quick to request in-class parties, as rewards for hard work or as celebrations of a holiday (no matter how big or small) or classmates’ birthdays. Though motivated by grades, this group of students enjoyed being with one another and seemed to enjoy AP Literature class. The students ranged from conscientious and fastidious to some with a more lackadaisical approach to homework and note-taking. Generally, this class required little prodding to get on task when an assignment was given or a discussion was taking place. They had a great sense of humor, and at one point staged a mock “revolt” when more work was given, casting their books and papers to the ground and pouting. They later picked up their materials and resumed their work, aware of the balance between the gravity of their task and the fun they could have while accomplishing it.

These AP Literature students were very bright and showed clear understandings of the literature or writing on which they were working. When their multiple-choice
practice exams were handed back, students were able to argue their point on why they chose a certain answer, using the text they were given to back up their responses. Many students possessed these judging and evaluative skills, as well as the analytical skills required by these challenging multiple-choice questions. Likewise, student response to a series of *Hamlet* review questions in the Fall semester revealed their advanced skills in making inferences from texts. Even when they misunderstood the crux of a question, they used the texts well to justify their positions. These students were clearly “advanced” in many ways, and are exactly the kind of students likely to do well on an AP examination.

Table 3.1 illustrates some basic demographic information about the students researched in this class as part of my self-study. These students agreed to participate and their names are pseudonyms.

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<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JULIE</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KEVIN</td>
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<tr>
<td>OLIVIA</td>
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<tr>
<td>PATRICIA</td>
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<tr>
<td>QUENTIN</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROGER</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Procedures

A General View

The study took place during a thirty-seven day period, beginning with a pretest that measured vocabulary identification and analysis of Percy Shelley’s “Ozymandias,” as well as asked students about their favorite poems and poets. Students then read the Barron’s study guide and familiarized themselves with the language of poetry analysis (or refamiliarized, for those who had already been exposed to some of it). After being given several days to study the material, they were given a multiple-choice test on the material. The language of poetry analysis was presented up front before students plunged into giving their oral presentations. A scansion review was given because students felt they needed more practice hearing the rhythms of metered poetry.

The test was followed by an introduction to Sound and Sense and going over some of the material in class helped to get them started. I emphasized the concepts and poems during our discussions. During their reading, I gave the students a few quizzes to see if they were keeping up with the assigned reading. Motivating students to read during the last part of their senior year proved challenging, and I hoped that they would rise to the occasion. Inquiry groups were one of the ways that class discussions took place, with students being split into small groups to read and analyze a poem together.

After this preparation, students were asked to select a partner and choose a poem from our list, which ranged from John Donne to Langston Hughes to Margaret Atwood. The presentations they gave were geared towards exposure to a wide range of poetry, allowing them to construct the knowledge that they shared with the class. In this way, students would receive the benefit of each other’s interpretations and engage in the process of analysis. I hoped that the students would engage the poem and poet they were assigned as well.

Following the presentations, the test I had created was given, in order to gauge the students’ understanding of the presentations and the Sound and Sense concepts. As it turns out, the students had trouble with the construct and preparation for the exam, so a retest needed to be given. This was a real learning experience, as students and student teacher had to recalibrate and recover, reestablishing a positive classroom
environment. We did so with the poetry reading, during which they were encouraged to bring in poetry of their own, or poems they enjoyed. This helped them to reconnect personally with poetry again, after some frustrating circumstances involving it.

A retest of the poetry exam followed, which augmented their earlier scores. Students were also required to write a two-page comparison/contrast paper as a culminating assignment, bringing their achievements full-circle from the “Helen” / “To Helen” essay from the 1994 AP exam. In order to make the connection between the class and poetry more personal, at the end of the unit, I shared one of my own poems on a PowerPoint, along with the painting that inspired it. Lastly, a posttest measured their experiences and gains during the unit, in a similar format to the pretest, with a few differences: they were asked to share why they enjoyed or did not enjoy the poems they mentioned in the third question, and were asked to share what they had learned during the unit.

A Sample Lesson

Part of the challenge of this unit and AP Literature in general was the rapid pace that had to be kept in order to accomplish all of our objectives. The Barron’s guide featured an extensive vocabulary of poetic conventions, many of which required explanation, and reviewing several chapters of *Sound and Sense* each day while the class was reading it for homework was challenging. The amount of material we covered in the opening few weeks of the unit was astounding, and after seeing the results of the Barron’s multiple-choice exam I was concerned about whether students were doing the out-of-class reading. Many of the students at this point seemed overwhelmed by the terms and some were having trouble using scansion to identify the meter of lines of poetry. Part-to-whole analysis was challenging, and I wanted to provide my students with some chances to practice identifying figurative language, as well as to interpret poems.

Using small-group inquiry seemed to be a good way to introduce some poetry of the same difficulty that students would encounter on the AP exam and to give students some practice without a grade hanging over them. In examining poetry ranging from John Donne’s “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning” to Dickinson’s “A narrow fellow in the grass,” the exercise would also allow them to use each other’s readings as a resource and would allow me to observe them and get a better sense of their analytic skills. How my students approached and made meaning from a poem was more
important to me at this stage than their arriving at one of the critically accepted readings of the poem (although the ability to do just that would be expected of them on the AP exam).

When I introduced the “Inquiry Group” lesson (Appendix P), I carefully issued specific instructions when breaking the students into groups, in order to minimize confusion and maximize instructional time. My students took to the exercise very well, and little supervision was necessary in order to ensure their progress. Most often they were concerned with problems of interpretation, the question “what does this mean?” I nudged their understandings somewhat, but left the meaning to develop while they grew in their understanding of the techniques (figurative language and imagery) that brought these poems to life.

The large group discussion that followed was fruitful because students all heard oral readings of each poem, and listened to one another identify figurative language and sensory imagery. They were able to try out their understanding of these terms in a real context, which was something that I was eager for them to see: how each poet used these techniques to convey meaning, sensation, and even story. Frustrating for the students at times was the fact that we didn’t talk about the “meaning” (or accepted interpretation) of the poems immediately, but used a part-to-whole method of looking at the poems. The lesson concluded during the next class period, after giving each group a chance to share their findings. My only disappointment with this lesson was that we had to move on so quickly. My students really grew in their understanding of these terms and how they affected a reading of the poems.

This lesson plan is indicative of the kind of instruction that took place in my classroom, an attempt to engage the texts in group dialogue as much as possible, balancing reading and class discussion.

Data Sources

To determine the degree to which my teaching of poetry impacted student knowledge and belief, I collected data from several sources. Data was gathered from pre- and posttests, multiple choice and free-response tests, student writing done prior to
and at the end of the unit, and an oral presentation. With the exception of the pre- and posttests, all data sources were a part of the students’ normal curriculum and grade.

Pre- and Posttests

Parallel questionnaires, nearly identical to each another in format, were administered during class time, before and after the unit was taught. On the first administration, I introduced the pretest (Appendix D), taking time to explain the thesis I would be working on. I allowed ten to fifteen minutes for students to work on the pretest. During this time, several students asked me questions about the pretest, such as “What is the name of the poet they read to us in middle school English class?” attempting to obtain a few “answers.” They were tempted to share their “answers” with one another, which I did not allow because it would decrease the reliability of the data. Students were instructed to answer each question as best they could, even if they were not sure what to write.

At the end of the unit, several weeks later, I administered the posttest (Appendix E). Again, I only answered questions about the actual format of the test. Procedures were the same for the posttest, although students’ conversations with one another were less frequent, and they seemed to focus better, and were more comfortable with the format.

Multiple Choice Exams

About a week after the unit began (see Appendix A for a timetable of the unit), I administered the first of the two exams. Based on the readings from the Barron’s study guide, this test, a modification of an older exam that Mrs. Dunlap had in her files, was introduced in class. It was selected for the breadth of material it covered. It was administered with Scantron bubble sheets, and students were to work silently until they had answered each test item. This lengthy test took many of them the whole period to work on.

The second of the two exams (Appendix G) was based on the students’ in-class poetry presentations and the readings from Sound and Sense. I constructed this exam, using three basic parts. First, students answered a matching section that required them to match the poets to information from each presentation. A short answer section asked students to define four terms, such as “metaphor” or “Shakespearean sonnet,” and provide examples. Then students were given one of T.S. Eliot’s “Preludes” and were asked to scan a line from the poem, identify five instances of sensory imagery, and write
a short paragraph about the tone of the poem and the imagery used to create that tone. This test was also administered in class, and students completed it silently.

Following this exam, students complained to the supervising teacher and even spoke to school administrators about how difficult the test had been. I also had an opportunity to speak with students, who felt ill-prepared by the review sheet they had been given only a few days prior to the test and felt inadequate to tackle the test’s format. Hence, a new test was administered during the following week, which supplemented the very low scores from the previous version of the test. This test was comprised of a free-response section that asked students to give information about the presentations they remembered, and several AP-style multiple-choice questions, based on two of the poems from the presentations. Both of the test and retest were taken on students’ own sheets of notebook paper; neither required the entire class period to complete.

**Comparison/Contrast Essays**

In December 2003, before the unit began, the first comparison/contrast essay (Appendix J) was administered in class. Students took the test on their own paper with only the prompt to guide them, for fifty minutes, the duration of the class period. It was one of the students’ first exposures to AP Literature prompts and was one of the actual prompts used in the 1994 AP Exam. Students were scored using the AP rubric and given a score between one and nine. This essay is included in the study because it demonstrates essay writing on poetry and can be compared to the second comparison/contrast essay for analysis of student growth.

The second of the two prompts (Appendix K) was a modified version of one of the questions from Chapter One of *Sound and Sense*. Students were given the assignment and were told to write two pages on the poem pairing of their choice, at home. This allowed students additional time to compose their essays and to put them on a word processor. Students were scored on an AP-style scale (Appendix L).

**Poetry Presentations**

Poetry presentations (Appendix M) were assigned in class, and students were allowed to choose a partner, and then sign up for a poem from a list compiled by the supervising teacher. Poems were to be analyzed using a method known as TP(P)-CASTT (Appendix O) and presented in class, along with information about the poet and poem. Students were to be prepared on February 23rd with their presentations or
suffer a penalty of ten (out of a possible hundred) points on their grade. Students were
given fifteen minutes per presentation and presented a visual (2-D or 3-D) that
represented their poem(s) in a meaningful way. Students were scored using a rubric
(Appendix N), and I scored while the presentations were given.

Data Analysis

During and following the unit, the results of the major assignments were
recorded and catalogued. After all data was collected and the teaching completed, I
analyzed the database to determine the effectiveness of my teaching. The pre- and
posttests were used as primary sources and student work from the class was used as
secondary sources. In this way, the effectiveness of the unit on the group of 12th grade
AP students could be measured and described.

Pre- and Posttests

The pre-and posttests were scored according to a rubric that allowed students to
demonstrate what they knew, as opposed to penalizing them for what they did not
know (Table 3.2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Scoring Guide</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Definition of terms: • Iambic pentameter • Ballad • Villanelle • Personification</td>
<td>0 pts: blank response 1 pt = “I don’t know, I’m not sure;” an attempt to answer the question 2 pts = some attempt to recall prior knowledge, but not quite the right answer 3 pts = for vague replies, “something to do with poetic language” 7-9 pts = answer correct, but uses wrong terminology 10 pts = correct answer, right term 5 pts = each additional correct fact or example</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Scoring Guide</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 2. Analysis, Shelley’s “Ozymandias”:  
• Circle each device or convention  
• Name it if possible  
• Write sentences in any mode about poem | 0 pts = blank response  
1 pt = “I don’t know, I’m not sure;” an attempt to answer the question  
2 pts = something circled, or an attempted answer, but incorrect  
3 pts = something circled and vaguely correct  
5 pts = answer correct but lacking specificity  
10 pts = each technique correctly identified  
10 pts = any plausible analysis offered within a sentence |
| 3. Poetry Awareness:  
• Name favorite poems, or poems they have read  
• (Posttest) Why they like those poems | 0 pts = blank response  
1 pt = “I don’t know, I’m not sure;” an attempt to answer the question  
5 pts = an opinion offered, but no poets or poems mentioned  
10 pts = each poet or poem mentioned |
| 4. Additional information  
• Thoughts on poems/poetry not covered by earlier questions  
• (Posttest) Anything they think they learned during the unit | 0 pts = blank response  
1 pt = “I don’t know, I’m not sure;” an attempt to answer the question  
5 pts = each opinion or thought about poetry |

Partial credit was given to answers that demonstrated thought. The posttest was nearly identical to the pretest. The differences were modifications to the posttest, including an opportunity for students to explain why they selected the poems they chose as their favorites on Question #3 and an opportunity to talk about what they learned during the poetry unit in Question #4. This presented students with new opportunities to demonstrate their growth through the unit.

**Multiple Choice**

On the Barron’s test, the Scantrons were actually scored by hand, due to a snafu with the Scantron machine. Students were given one point for each correct item and this was their total score. On the original Sound and Sense test, students were given two
points for every correct answer on the matching section, which contained seventeen
questions. Five points were given for each fully correct answer for definitions, and
partial credit was given to students who were able to give a correct definition or a good
example, but not both. Students were given partial credit on the third section as well,
out of the number of points assigned to each question (half credit was given if students
called the line of poetry “iambic hexameter,” for example).

In the retest’s first section, a point was given for each piece of information
correctly recalled from the presentations, for a maximum of five points per poem. The
emphasis here was recall of basic information from the presentations their peers had
made. The second set of questions on the retest, all multiple-choice, were scored for
correctness and given seven points per correct answer. The scores of the original and
retest were added together, as demonstrated on the scores in Appendix C. The aim was
to give students scores more representative of their learning than the original test scores
alone.

Comparison/Contrast essays

These comparison/contrast essays were scored by using a rubric (Appendix L)
that was similar to the nine-point rubric given to readers who evaluated the
“Helen”/“To Helen” essay during the reading for the 1994 AP exam. The “Helen”/“To
Helen” essay was given a score by myself and two peer evaluators. The score recorded
with their grades was the peer evaluators’, while the one retained in this data is mine,
kept for comparison with my scores of the Sound and Sense comparison/contrast essay.
The scores on the Sound and Sense essay were complemented by comments and
suggestions for the writers that would hopefully push them a step further in their
analytical writing. Both essays were evaluated according to an AP-style rubric in order
to demonstrate to students what they were up against in their AP readership.

Presentations

The presentations were evaluated based on the rubric provided in Appendix N.
Students were evaluated on their oral presentation of the poem to reinforce the idea that
poetry is an oral/aural art form. The analysis-oriented portion of the assessment was
the bulk of the grade, because those were the skills I was emphasizing in the class, using
TP(P)-CASTT and scansion to explore what a poem might mean. The biographies of the
poets and information about the poems were included for their value in placing poems
in historical contexts and in the context of the oeuvre of the poets who wrote them.
Grading the visual was a way of encouraging a creative response to the poems, as well as visually reinforcing key elements of each poem. Lastly, each presentation was graded on its organization and readiness when due. I felt this feature was important because many of my seniors were beginning to taper off in their dedication to academics, as the end of their senior year close at hand. It was also a measure of the kind of readiness expected in a collegiate environment, after which AP classes are purportedly modeled. This assessment was important because it was based on students’ own work with a poem that they had some time to consider, and it placed student learning before the class. It was also a chance for students to share and experience new and unfamiliar poems.

**Conclusions**

This study of my effectiveness was based on a poetry unit taught in a 12th grade AP Literature and Composition class and drew on multiple sources of data, using pre- and posttests as primary sources and student work as secondary sources. The effectiveness of my teaching was evaluated through the examination of learning gains, according to the level of skill and appreciation, and a variety of assessments captured a fuller picture of student learning.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

In order to determine the relative effectiveness of my teaching, I investigated learning gains in my 12th grade AP Literature and Composition class. Teacher action research methodology was chosen because this study is a self-evaluation, designed to determine student learning in order to offer information about my own practice. Data sources included: pre- and posttests, two multiple-choice exams, two comparison/contrast essays, and an oral presentation.

**Pre- and Posttest Learning Gains**

Pre- and posttests were scored with the same rubric (Table 3.1) which was used to award quality points for answers given. Pre- and posttests were parallel, with the exception of slight changes made in Questions #3 and #4 (Appendices D and E). Gains were based on the comparison between these two scores.

Table 4.1 details my 3rd period class’s pre- and posttest scores and evidences learning gains. Pretest scores were ranked from highest to lowest. The difference between the pre- and posttests was calculated, and mean class averages were computed for both of the tests and the learning gains as well. The mean average score for the class’s pretests was 48 points and the mean average score for the posttest was 150 points. The mean average learning gain was 104 points. Of the seventeen students who took both tests, 71% scored below the average on the pretest, revealing a disparity between those with a lot of prior knowledge of poetry and those without. On the posttest, however, only 53% fell below the average, which is significant because it demonstrates an equalization that took place in the scores. This can be explained by the fact that the gains of students who scored higher on the pretest were less than those who scored lower on the pretest, whose scores revealed more growth.
Table 4.1: Pre-and Posttest Scores and Learning Gains

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Pretest</th>
<th>Posttest</th>
<th>Gains made</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CHRIS</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GLENNIA</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PATRICIA</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEREK</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRANCES</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMILY</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KEVIN</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OLIVIA</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRIS</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LUIS</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>99</td>
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<tr>
<td>MONICA</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>QUENTIN</td>
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<td>150</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NATALIE</td>
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<td>99</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROGER</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>108</td>
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<td>ASHLEY</td>
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<td>130</td>
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<td>JULIE</td>
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<td>121</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRENDA</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Average (to the nearest whole number) | 48 | 150 | 104 |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No Pre- or Posttest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HANNAH</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to pre- and posttest comparison, the measured gains are impressive, considering that even the lowest gain (56) is more than five times as high as the lowest pretest score (10). No students showed a regression in score, and 88% of students at least doubled their pretest score with the posttest. I was pleased to discover that the average gain in student learning was quite high (104), considering that the highest score on the pretest was 116. The gains that the posttest reveal indicate that students were able to identify poetic conventions more readily and were able to respond to the last two questions, which tapped their opinions on poetry and asked them to identify poetry they liked. This level of growth indicates that these students responded well to my instruction, and that I was effective in conveying the material.

Some of these scores surprised me. I did not expect Derek to outscore some of the students (especially Ashley, Emily, and Olivia), as he sometimes did not put forth
the effort that they did in AP Literature, as surmised from the evaluation their respective work both in class and at home. However, Derek’s numbers on the pretest, posttest, and gains, indicate that he not only knew more than most of the class at the outset of the unit, but demonstrated that he learned more during the course of the unit. Interestingly, his assignments and tests during the unit, used as secondary sources in this study, indicate that his gains were average or below average, revealing inconsistency between the primary and secondary sources.

Another inconsistency between the pre- and posttests and the rest of the unit was Ashley’s set of scores. While her pretest score placed her in the 18th percentile, and her posttest and gains were below average, she consistently did well on tests, compositions and the presentation. This inconsistency and Derek’s scores suggest the value of using multiple assessments to gather information about student learning.

One area of improvement I would make in the gathering of primary source data would be better explanations of the pre- and posttests as they were administrated. The format was foreign to the students, and some examples might have helped to stir their thinking and improve the pretest scores of those who may not have understood that quantity as well as quality would be part of my evaluation of their answers. The benefit to their unfamiliarity was that the assessment was able to gauge how well they responded to tests they were not prepared for in any way. This was of some benefit because one of the “skills” of AP test-taking is learning how to read and respond to unfamiliar questions.

For the most part, the primary source analysis was confirmed by the secondary data sources, and I felt confident that the pre- and posttests were accurate measurements of student knowledge about poetic conventions and student dispositions concerning poetry. The primary and secondary data confirmed each other and proved reliable. Appendix C illustrates the class’s scores on all assessments.

**Cluster Analysis**

In addition, to facilitate analysis and to consider learning gains for individual students, pre- and posttest scores were also examined by clusters, so as to determine the gains of four groups, or kinds of students: high, high middle, low middle and low.
Each cluster’s pre- and posttest scores were averaged, as were the learning gains. This analysis looks at which students were affected most. By grouping in this way, their gains, and thus the effectiveness of my teaching, can be examined according to their pre-unit knowledge. Whose needs did I serve best? Data table 4.2 illustrates those results, naming the high group Cluster #1, the high middle group Cluster #2, and so on. Cluster #1 averaged a 100-point learning gain, while Cluster #2 averaged 143 points, Cluster #3 averaged 94 points, and Cluster #4 averaged 87 points.

**Table 4.2: Comparison of Student Learning**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Pretest</th>
<th>Posttest</th>
<th>Gains made</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>CHRIS</td>
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<tr>
<td>PATRICIA</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEREK</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cluster #1 Average</strong></td>
<td><strong>84</strong></td>
<td><strong>182</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRANCES</td>
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<td>217</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMILY</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>173</td>
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<tr>
<td>KEVIN</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OLIVIA</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cluster #2 Average</strong></td>
<td><strong>44</strong></td>
<td><strong>187</strong></td>
<td><strong>143</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRIS</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LUIS</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>99</td>
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<tr>
<td>MONICA</td>
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<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QUENTIN</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cluster #3 Average</strong></td>
<td><strong>35</strong></td>
<td><strong>130</strong></td>
<td><strong>94</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NATALIE</td>
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<td>99</td>
<td>69</td>
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<tr>
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<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRENDA</td>
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<td>99</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cluster #4 Average</strong></td>
<td><strong>25</strong></td>
<td><strong>111</strong></td>
<td><strong>87</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No Pre- or Posttest

**General Observations**

Cluster #1, the group with the highest pretest scores, is representative of the students who score highest on other tests and projects in the class, with the exception of Derek, who was discussed earlier. These students’ scores show that they had
confidence when approaching the pretest and felt they knew enough to answer with some kind of response on all of the questions. The pretest scores cover a nearly 60-point spread, indicating a range of knowledge, even within this high-scoring bracket. All of their posttest scores are above 100, and their average gain was 100 points, making their gains the second highest of the four clusters. Their posttest scores dropped to a 30-point spread, ranging from Glenna’s 169 to Patricia’s 198. This increase in consistency indicates that this group had approximately the same amount of skill and confidence in their knowledge of the material as one other, as demonstrated by the pre- and posttests.

Cluster #2, the next highest in terms of pretest scores, demonstrates the most learning gains. Interestingly, their 187 average posttest score is only a few points higher than Cluster #1’s, meaning that they were close in skill level to those in the highest cluster. This group was able to “catch up” to those who scored as many as three times their pretest score. Olivia, who scored a 37 on the pretest, surpassed Chris, the pretest high scorer, by 10 points. This group had the highest individual gains as well. Emily (173), Frances (163), and Olivia (145) had higher gains than any of their classmates. The pre- and posttests indicate the highest level of growth is in Cluster #2, which seems to have benefited most from my teaching.

Cluster #3 was remarkably similar in their pretest scores, with only Iris deviating from the average of 35. Though they started out similarly, their posttest scores revealed a wide range, from Monica’s 94 to Quentin’s 150. The gains in this cluster were nearly the same as the top bracket, with more than half making gains less than 100 points. The gains in this cluster deviated less from one another than did the students in Cluster #1, from Monica’s 59 to Quentin’s 115. Monica scored lower on the pretest (94) than any other student and consequently showed one of the lowest gains (59). This cluster demonstrates how students with approximately the same level of skill and disposition towards poetry when beginning a unit can have different outcomes, affected differently by instruction.

Cluster #4 represents the bracket that scored lowest on the pretest and benefited the least from my instruction. These students ranged in pretest scores from 10 to 30, and posttest scores and gains were all below the average 150 and 104, respectively. Still, students like Natalie more than tripled their pretest score (from 30 to 99), while Brenda’s score on the posttest (99) was nearly ten times that of her pretest (10). Even the lowest growth was still significant, which demonstrates just how much each student
learned from my instruction during this unit. All of these students were great learners, and responded very well to my teaching.

In order to better interpret the learning gains in the clusters, four students, each representative of their cluster, were selected for closer examination. Chris, Olivia, Luis, and Brenda represent their respective clusters or are in some way atypical and in need of explanation.

**Cluster #1 Representative: Chris**

Chris’s scores on the pre- and posttests are unusual because he scored highest overall on the pretest (116), yet was lowest in terms of gains (56). Chris is an extremely bright student, has a great love of film, and is the son of two local university professors. He truly wowed the class with his abilities with film and video earlier in the semester when giving a presentation on one of the novels he studied, producing an adaptation of a scene, as well as a documentary (not required as part of the project), which he then transferred to DVD. He also scored very well on the essays, and the other assignments in the unit. Table 4.3 breaks down Chris’s scores on the pretest and posttest, question by question:

<table>
<thead>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CHRIS</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chris’s scores grew most in the first two questions, the naming and analysis sections. This is consistent with Chris’s own assessment of his growth; he mentions metonymy and synecdoche in his Question #4 response. Chris also mentions that he “learned to appreciate poetry more” and learned how to write limericks. The fact that limericks were not directly taught indicates something important about Chris and learners like him.
Chris is a self-motivated, and in many ways, self-directed learner. He also freely made connections in class between John Donne’s poetry and Donne’s inclusion in the canon of hymnody at his Episcopal church, with no prompting from me. Chris is a responsible student and usually turns work in on time, but towards the middle of the semester his many responsibilities caught up with him and he turned in a few papers late. Chris cleared his late submission of these assignments with me, and did fine work when he turned them in. He knows how to prioritize, and he is confident enough in his abilities to offer new thoughts during classes.

This may indicate why Chris did not have huge learning gains. He had the highest score on the pretest, because he knew a good bit of the material we were about to teach anyway. His learning was most likely at its apex when doing his presentation on Robert Frost’s “Birches” and Dylan Thomas’s “Fern Hill,” which he collaborated on with Glenna, whose pretest score was the second highest in the class. Even when confronted with the very challenging Sound and Sense test, his curiosity was piqued about the answers to the questions, rather than him being upset about not knowing them. Chris is simply an indefatigable learner who, if given a little space, will learn what interests him most. That the pre- and posttests did not completely cover what he learned should come as no surprise.

I interpret Chris’s small gains to mean that I did not find a way to connect what he was learning with the material, and did not find ways of pushing him further in what he already knew. For example, Chris already knew a good bit about scansion when he took his pretest (one of the few who correctly identified iambic pentameter). Chris could have been encouraged to do some research during his project on the traditional connections between scansion and meaning, and what those connections might mean for Robert Frost or Dylan Thomas as Modernists. Instead of assigning him supplementary work, pushing his existent knowledge base further might have helped him to grow and show gains.

Cluster #2 Representative: Olivia

Olivia is a bright student, a cheerleader, and a very organized, hard worker. She is fairly quiet in class, though social with friends, and laughs a lot. She sits on the front row, and she is usually keyed in to whatever is being taught in class, a fastidious note-taker. Olivia asks questions when unclear about something, and she is generally a
pleasure to have in class. Here is a breakdown of her performance on the pre- and posttests:

Table 4.4: Olivia’s Pre- and Posttest Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OLIVIA</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Olivia’s performance on the pre- and posttests is very representative of the other students in Cluster #2. Her score on the pretest was below the mean average, but her learning gains were among the highest. She ranked 3rd highest in gains, and the other two highest gains were in her cluster. Olivia represents the kind of student who, as demonstrated, the instruction benefited the most.

Of her own learning during the unit, Olivia said she “learned the different types of rhyme patterns, end rhyme, slant rhyme and how scansion works, the different names for the number of stanzas.” Her gains grew widely throughout, but most evidently in her analysis and discussion of poems she had read. Of her experience reading “Meeting at Night” by Robert Browning, for example, she keyed in on the technical aspects of the poem, “rhyming words at the end of each line (end rhyme) and uses of details auditory, tactile, visual.” Whereas Question #2, analyzing “Ozymandias” on her pretest, yielded only a few underlined end rhymes, labeled “rhyme,” on her posttest, she mentions auditory and visual imagery, alliteration, enjambment, allusion, and personification, a wide arsenal of terms.

Olivia’s very detail-oriented approach lent itself well to this method of studying poetry. Her approach is characterized by her presentation on Browning’s “Meeting at Night,” which featured six pages’ worth of notes, including a full scansion of the poem and a thorough TP(P)-CASTT analysis, printed on parchment-style paper. None of the notes were required, and her presentation was flawlessly informative. Olivia represents
the dedicated student who meets a challenge with persistence and diligence, learning what a teacher expects, especially as it affects her grade! Students such as Olivia will always produce gains, as long as they are well-directed on assignments. They have naturally high capacity for learning, but even more so, a tenacity that belies their years, and a great capacity for retaining knowledge. Olivia’s Question #4 response on her pretest was, “I don’t really know anything except that sometimes they rhyme.” Olivia’s growth during the unit is striking.

One of the things that helped Olivia in my design and instruction of this unit was an emphasis on identification and application of conventions. Her work ethic and analytic eye helped her to spot techniques being used in poetry. She remembered these well from her study of Barron’s and Sound and Sense, but she could be pushed even further in terms of making more right-brained connections with why a given poet utilized that technique to convey their message to their audience. Making these larger connections is something I would like to have spent more time doing with the entire class, although many of them latched onto this sort of synthesis with minimal demonstration in class.

Cluster #3 Representative: Luis

Luis is a good example of a bright student who began the unit with some ideas about poetry, and one who gained a greater grasp of poetry analysis and the terms associated with it by the time it was over. Luis began the unit with a score on the pretest just two points less than Olivia. In terms of “utmost” dedication, he may have been winding down in the last half of his senior year, but his knowledge base certainly was no less strong.

Interestingly, Luis’s favorite poem, which he mentioned on both the pre- and posttest, is the verse-drama Murder in the Cathedral by T.S. Eliot. Eliot is a poet frequently anthologized but often bypassed by high school teachers because of the highly allusive nature of his work. It is not usually studied until college, but he apparently knew it well enough to mention it (twice!). Here is a chart that demonstrates Luis’s growth from pre- to posttest:
Table 4.5: Luis’s Pre- and Posttest Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LUIS</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Luis showed a remarkable amount of ingenuity in using prior knowledge in hypothesizing on Question #1, and was gutsy enough to offer answers even when he was uncertain of them. One interesting feature of his pretest was his stab at defining “ballad” as a “poem dealing with love.” He qualified it afterwards with this statement, “just trying to relate it to ‘balata’ which is a Spanish word.” This sort of ingenious thinking is exactly what good readers do: drawing on prior knowledge to fill in the “gaps” in their understanding.

Luis and his partner attempted to draw on their prior knowledge with Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s “Kubla Khan” during their poetry presentation, and he made some excellent leaps in interpretation. “Kubla Khan,” with its shifting dream-imagery, can be difficult to interpret even with a few reads under one’s belt, but it was clear that Luis and his partner did not use online help to expound upon the poem. Their interpretation was their own, even if it did not explain the basic points of the text completely.

The difficulty in teaching at this point was to know if and when to step in and offer the “right,” or most commonly accepted interpretation of the poem. I may believe in the power of the response of readers and their right to see things in their own way, but if their interpretation is less defensible than a traditional one, should I one allow a weaker interpretation to be passed off as “right”? In this case, I chose to offer the traditional view of the poem, but I also let students know that the traditional view was just and only that. If students know that the market is still not cornered on every possible interpretation of a text, it gives them greater incentive to encounter it on their own.

I was glad to see Luis challenged with Coleridge’s poem. I would rather see students who are genuinely trying to understand a poem hit a snag and have to work to
solve the dilemma than for students to be assigned work which is always just beneath their level of skill. In this case, I could have assigned him more poems of intermediate difficulty to interpret before he came to Coleridge. Unfortunately, most of my at-home assignments involved reading in Barron’s and Sound and Sense. Perhaps working with some of those more directed exercises would have ultimately produced more gains, and offered Luis the practice that he needed in order to learn and move to the point at which he would be able not only to interpret poetry, but to defend his readings of it.

**Cluster #4 Representative: Brenda**

Of the students that scored in the lowest cluster on the pretest, Brenda, who scored 10 points on the pretest, scored 90 points on the posttest, and had an 89-point learning gain, was most representative of the kind of learning that took place. She is a hard-working student who is undaunted by the level of responsibility required by AP Literature, but sometimes she lacks the confidence in her mastery of the material, and takes less risks than other students. Brenda is a quiet and pleasant student who, like Olivia, is one of several cheerleaders in the class. She looks forward to using her skills towards a business or accounting degree in college, and her orientation towards detail would serve her well in that field. Here is a breakdown of her pre- and posttest scores:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BRENDA</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Brenda only listed a definition of “personification” on her pretest, which was correct. With this, she left very little margin for error. She handed in the pretest with a look of insecurity, mirrored by her nearly blank pretest. I would argue that Brenda’s lack of confidence and sense of caution about giving wrong answers would work against her on the AP, or any other high-stakes test, without the preparation that a class
like ours was designed to impart, though her caution is an admirable characteristic in other ways. Students such as Brenda need practice and instruction, not so much to teach them as to license them to answer with confidence.

Brenda’s confidence grew over the course of the unit, especially when given time to prepare. Her test score on the first version of the Sound and Sense test was far above average for her class, and her second score gave her a very solid “B” on a very difficult test. She also achieved a 102% on her presentation on Browning’s “Meeting at Night,” with extra credit given because of her superb organization. By the time she finished the unit, she had gains of 89 points represented by her posttest. Brenda demonstrated a steady gain through the course of the unit, and said of her learning, “I learned how to better analyze the meaning of a poem and certain characteristics that may be in a poem.”

In Brenda’s case, I would liked to have given her some very simple practice exercises, perhaps even with less intimidating poems. Building confidence in students like Brenda means taking them step by step through the process of mastery. Approval from a teacher who “knows the answer” enables students like Brenda to begin to be secure enough to be able to step out on their own interpretations and ultimately to need less help in learning what they need to know.

Secondary Sources

In addition to data collected via pre- and posttesting, secondary sources of data including two multiple-choice tests, two essays, and an oral presentation, were also analyzed to confirm or elaborate on the data from the primary sources, and to give a more complete picture of students’ growth, and thus my effectiveness as a teacher.

Multiple-Choice Tests

Students were asked to read extensively outside of class during the course of this unit, to memorize terminology and be able to apply the concepts found in their readings. The format of the second test (Appendix G) and its corresponding retest (Appendix H) differed greatly from the original multiple-choice test. The second test and retest covered not only terms and concepts, but measured student knowledge about the presentations done in class. These second tests also pushed students into
analysis. Because the Barron’s and *Sound and Sense* tests are constructed differently and measure different sets of knowledge, they are only included in the study to show student progress through testing, not direct “before and after” growth. Student scores on these tests are listed on Table 4.7.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Barron's Test</th>
<th>Sound and Sense Test/Retest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ASHLEY</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>37+55=92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRENDA</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>37+51=88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHRIS</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>34+57=91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEREK</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>33+46=79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMILY</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>34+58=92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRANCES</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>40+54=94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GLENNIA</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>40+60=100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HANNAH</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>33+59=92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRIS</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>34+52=86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JULIE</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>40+30=70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KEVIN</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>26+43=69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LUIS</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>30+47=77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MONICA</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>30+47=77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NATALIE</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>30+49=79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OLIVIA</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>34+54=88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PATRICIA</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>36+57=93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QUENTIN</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>38+58=96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROGER</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>26+32=58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.7 lists students in alphabetical order, with their Barron’s and *Sound and Sense* test scores. The *Sound and Sense* test score is derived from taking part of the student’s first test score (half of Pt. II and all of Pt. III, as in Appendix G) and adding it to the number of points students received on the retest score. Parts of both tests were combined to yield a total of 100 points.

Students such as Roger scored better (86) on the Barron’s test and its more familiar multiple-choice format than the short answer format of the *Sound and Sense* tests. Others, like Natalie, performed better (79) when they were able to create their own short response. The scores on these tests, coupled with the pre-and posttest scores,
revealed that various students achieved more on one assessment or another. Quentin, for example, showed only slightly larger gains than the average on the pre- and posttests. On both of these tests however, he performed very well, scoring higher than most if not all his classmates. I was glad that I assessed knowledge in so many different ways during the unit because each student was given an opportunity to excel. This was one of the better features of my instruction during the poetry unit.

**Writing Assignments**

Two writing assignments are also included in the database of this study. One assignment, the “Helen/To Helen” essay (Appendix J), came from the 1994 AP exam that the students took as practice in December, months before the unit started. It serves as a good comparison with the later comparison/contrast assignment, drawn from *Sound and Sense* (Appendix K). Both assignments required the writer to analyze a set of poems using comparison and contrast. The major difference was that students were not required to adhere to a time limit with the second assignment. The two assignments’ scores are listed in Table 4.8, scored on the nine-point rubric found in Appendix L. Numbers separated by “/” indicate that a student’s score was borderline.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>“Helen/To Helen” essay</th>
<th><em>Sound and Sense</em> essay</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ASHLEY</td>
<td>6/7</td>
<td>8/9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRENDA</td>
<td>4/5</td>
<td>4/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHRIS</td>
<td>8/9</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEREK</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMILY</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8/9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRANCES</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GLENNA</td>
<td>8/9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HANNAH</td>
<td>5/6</td>
<td>7/8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRIS</td>
<td>6/7</td>
<td>7/8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JULIE</td>
<td>5/6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KEVIN</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LUIS</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MONICA</td>
<td>6/6</td>
<td>5/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NATALIE</td>
<td>6/7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OLIVIA</td>
<td>6/7</td>
<td>7/8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PATRICIA</td>
<td>6/7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QUENTIN</td>
<td>7/8</td>
<td>8/9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROGER</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Only Chris and Luis regressed in score and Derek and Brenda remained at the same score. All other students saw gains in their writing scores, especially Ashley, Frances, and Patricia. They gained two, four, and three points respectively. Student growth in writing generally takes longer than a month to demonstrate, but I believe that in this case, these results occurred for three reasons. The first is the lack of a time limit imposed on the second essay. Most students responded very positively to this when the assignment was given. “On-demand” writing can be nerve-wracking and frustrating due to the scant amount of time a writer has to organize their thoughts.

On the second essay, students were allowed to write on their choice of several pairs of poems. Having a choice meant that students could select a set of poems that they felt drawn to, because the poems were shorter, or simpler in construction, or held some connection or interest for the writer. The first essay was based on a set of poems, by Edgar Allen Poe and H.D. respectively, that was given to them. Having a choice in what they were writing on helped them invest in their writing more, and thus write better.

Third, they were more familiar with the language of poetry, its conventions and structure, than before the unit began. Students had read tens of poems during the unit, and this assignment was a culmination of their knowledge. My teaching proved effective in that it showed students that they could write well on poetry. All students scored at least a borderline 4/5 score, and most wrote for higher scores. The unfamiliarity with analysis and poetry had faded, due to the effectiveness of the instruction and their hard work.

**Poetry Presentations**

Students were also required to give oral presentations on a poet and poem, which they selected from a list created by Mrs. Dunlap (Appendix M). Students shared responsibility for the presentation with a partner, and they presented their poet/poem to the class. This enabled the entire class to benefit from their learning, and exposed the class to some important poems as well as poets who frequently appear on the AP exam. No one scored below the 87th percentile on their oral presentation, and some students earned extra credit for having a superior visual, or well-written notes which they
distributed to the class, neither of which was required. Presentation scores are found in Table 4.9.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Presentation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ASHLEY</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRENDA</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHRIS</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEREK</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMILY</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRANCES</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GLENNIA</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HANNAH</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRIS</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JULIE</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KEVIN</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LUIS</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MONICA</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NATALIE</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OLIVIA</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PATRICIA</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QUENTIN</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROGER</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These scores represent the result of my main assessment of their ability to use the poetic analysis method TP(P)-CASTT (Appendix O), and demonstrate the class’s knowledge of poetic conventions. Overall, the class did very well, and even students who did not score particularly well on other assessments achieved higher scores on this one. I liked this assessment the most, because it allowed for more creative freedom on the part of the students. Iris and Hannah, for example, tackled Margaret Atwood’s “Siren Song” and dressed up stuffed animals to represent the characters in the poem, while Natalie baked a coffin-shaped cake in honor of Emily Dickinson’s “Because I could not stop for Death.” It was a good learning experience for everyone, and the creative nature of the project stimulated great interest in the poems that were presented.

Students were also given time in advance of their presentation to work on the project. They prepared for their presentation with their own copy of the rubric in hand.
This aspect of the project allowed students the opportunity to score well, because they knew exactly what was expected of them. This was an effective demonstration of what students had learned because it allowed them to show what they knew, as opposed to the evaluation revealing what they did not know.

Summary

This study of teacher effectiveness, conducted in my 12th grade AP Literature class, demonstrated that my instruction was effective, producing learning gains in pre- and posttests and in the other major assessments of the poetry unit. Student learning, measured by multiple assessments, was the goal of instruction, and revealed by use of multiple types of assessment, that my students grew in their familiarity with poetic conventions, as well as in their appreciation of poetry.
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Studying my effectiveness as a teacher of poetry during my student teaching semester in a 12th grade Advanced Placement (AP) Literature and Composition class has led me to reconsider the following points:

1) Why my instruction during the course of the unit was effective.
2) The ways this research has provoked new thought in my own philosophy about teaching and research, and how my philosophy has changed because of it.
3) How my instruction will change because of this research and what I will do differently in the future.

In this chapter, I will consider the reasons for my instruction’s effectiveness, discuss the changes that this study has wrought in my teaching and research philosophies, and propose changes to my instructional methodology as a result of this research.

The Effectiveness of My Instruction

The learning gains from my 3rd period class demonstrate, in numeric form, that my instructional time with them was effective. In analyzing the data, I found that my instruction was effective because students’ attitudes toward poetry were positively affected and students gained confidence in their ability to read, understand, and analyze poetry. Instruction was also effective because of good use of assessment.

Students’ Attitudes Towards Poetry: Building Confidence

The learners in this study responded very well to instruction in reading and analysis of poetry, as demonstrated by gains from the pre- and posttests and confirmed by the secondary sources. Their self-assessments on Question #4 in the posttest provided the opportunity to report “anything” they learned during the unit. These replies were weighted less in point value than the analysis responses because of the focus on analysis during the unit, but all participants had more to say in this area than before. The self-assessment was as potent a measure of teacher effectiveness as the
number gain. The fact that students could say with confidence that they understand poetry at the end of instruction is very powerful evidence indeed.

Another encouraging facet of the analysis of the self-assessment question was the commentary of students about how they gained a love or a respect for poetry. Preparing students for the AP exam and focusing almost solely on the analysis of literature can be disheartening; much head learning occurs, but one of my main concerns through the unit was for their hearts. Did they have an opportunity to experience poetry at all?

I was pleased to see so many positive responses about poetry, especially after reading about how we as teachers can suck the life out of poetry by teaching analysis. I worried that I could have become Dr. J. Evans Pritchard by overemphasizing it. Question #4 really asked about what they had learned, then left the question open-ended, so questions about appreciation weren’t directly addressed. This made it especially rewarding to see comments such as these from students:

- I’ve learned to respect poetry much more, and now that I understand some of the techniques a little better, I can truly enjoy the work to its fullest.
- Poetry is cool to just understand. It is like understanding a puzzle and using all the allusions and clues to figure out what the poet is trying to get at.
- Something I learned about poetry is that every poem doesn’t have some hidden meaning that you have to search for, sometimes poetry just means what it says. It has made reading poetry easier and more enjoyable.

Interestingly, a number of those responses were from males, traditionally perceived as less interested than girls in poetry. I would hypothesize that the intimidation that poetry can offer, especially to those with little experience in interpreting it, is removed when readers understand more about technique. Teaching them analysis can become a reading skill that removes that intimidation, increasing enjoyment.

From Brenda’s experience, I learned a great deal about the role confidence can play in learning. Student gains on the pre- and posttests were large because students not only knew the material, but because they could explain it! That confidence is naturally there for some students who, like Chris, are risk-takers, but for the more cautious, it is learned along with the material. Confidence must be instilled in the AP classroom, because the AP exam itself can be so intimidating. A student like Brenda,
who was limited by her perception that she did not know anything about poetry, had to
be convinced that she could become proficient. I saw that proficiency and confidence
grow when Brenda gave her presentation on Browning’s “Meeting at Night.” I believe
that particular assessment provided the practice that Brenda needed in order to feel
more authoritative as a reader and interpreter of poetry. The time she spent preparing
that presentation was well spent.

Overall, I was pleasantly surprised by the positive growth in student attitudes
towards poetry and was ecstatic that a number of students enjoyed a unit that I was so
unsure about teaching. I was very concerned that I might turn students off to poetry by
doing so much analysis, but it was apparent from student comments and gains that the
analysis ultimately helped students to grow in their enjoyment of poetry,
demonstrating to me that the instruction was effective.

Assessing Learning in the AP Classroom

In addition to attention to growth in student attitude towards poetry, I was
effective in teaching this unit due to my focus on growth and learning through
assessment. Much of the content of the poetry unit was suggested by my supervising
teacher and I could not stray far from it in order to achieve all the objectives she wanted
covered. From the start I liked that in her plan, learning was measured in a variety of
ways. As revealed by examining the data, different kinds of learners do well on
different assessments. All of my students achieved learning gains, and each student
performed better on one assessment than another. As demonstrated in this study,
students like Ashley, whose gains were not seen as easily through the pre- and
posttests, were able to better show their knowledge and skill through other
assessments. In Ashley’s case, the poetry presentation revealed more about her
learning than did other assessments.

Even though AP-style writing and multiple choice should be used to increase
some learners’ confidence by virtue of familiarity with the testing format, it is important
to gather data from several different sources in order to establish the most valid
evaluations. The view of the larger database of this unit, as opposed to the pre- and
posttests alone, revealed the best view of learning. As important as AP exam
preparedness is, it is most important to know that the students grew in skills and
knowledge. These will help them on the AP, but more importantly, later on in life.
Different assessments and the whole of the unit in the study of student learning showed
what students knew, as opposed to what they did not know (or if they just weren’t skilled at taking a particular kind of test!).

In poetry instruction, I found that the presentation assignment was an excellent measurement of how students could apply what they had learned. Absorbing terms and acquiring skills were helpful in building confidence, but application is what the AP exam attempts to measure most. Application is also an excellent goal to strive for because it shows students to be constructors of knowledge, not just passive receivers.

**Effects of the Study on Teaching and Research Philosophy**

This study will have lasting effects on my future classroom, not just in the way that I teach, but in the way I think about teaching and research. Most prominently affected was my thinking on student teaching, teacher action research, my accountability to stakeholders, AP course content and teaching practices, critical literary theory, and student needs.

**Student Teaching**

I cannot imagine becoming a teacher without a semester’s worth of internship/student teaching in a school, where the pressures and victories of day-by-day instruction with students are experienced firsthand. My student teaching experience built my confidence as an instructor, as a classroom manager, and as a person.

To help illustrate the nature of the value of student teaching, I will describe an example, drawn from an experience that happened halfway through my student teaching semester. The poetry unit was especially challenging and rewarding because of the *Sound and Sense* /poetry presentations testing scenario.

I had created an assessment that I felt that the students who were paying attention to the poetry presentations should be able to answer easily, including multiple-choice descriptions of the poets and poems presented (see Appendix G). My supervising teacher examined it and said she felt it would be too difficult for the students, but she gave me permission to use it anyway. I was able to experience firsthand a failure of judgment of my students’ abilities when students complained
(sometimes tearfully!) to my supervising teacher and administrators about how difficult
the test had been.

The main problem with the test was not student ability or knowledge. Students
simply felt unprepared in several ways. First, some students reported to me that they
had not known what to take notes on during the presentations and hence, did not
remember some of the information that was asked of them on the matching section of
the test. I had taken their ability to discern what would be noteworthy from the
presentations for granted, and the students’ grades on the test paid the price!

Second, students did not know that information about the poets would be tested
as well. Their preparation had focused more on the poems and they felt that my review
sheet (Appendix F) had been inadequate and not specific enough. One of the
interesting issues for the class, the student teacher, and supervising teacher to have to
deal with is the shift that occurs in how instruction, assessment, and classroom
management take place as the student teacher assumes control of the class. My
supervising teacher’s study sheets were different than mine, as were her tests. The shift
in this case had worked against us all, but I did not want students’ grades to suffer.
Nor did I want them to lose heart about the class or the material we were covering
because of my error in judgment.

In the midst of the student rebellion, I deliberated the possibilities of how best to
right this wrong, and I decided that my objective was to test what they knew as
opposed to what they could not recall. I did not want to entirely scrap the first test
either, because neither the students that I talked to about the test nor I felt it was either
completely invalid or unfair. So I took the better half of their answers from the
identification, combined it with the score from the third section of that test, and it
became the first number in the equation in the “Sound and Sense test” column in Table
4.7. The retest was composed in order to supplement those scores, and students were
given the opportunity to share five facts from the presentations that they remembered,
as well as a chance to answer some AP-style multiple-choice questions.

Regaining student morale at this point required some humbling admission of
failure in a speech to the class the next day, but I was able to pitch the proposal of a
retest to the class. They were very receptive to the idea and I gathered some written
feedback on questions I posed to them on the unit thus far (Appendix I). Their
comments helped me to shape the rest of my instructional time with them and enabled
them to communicate their feelings about our class in a more discreet fashion, if they so chose. Most importantly to me, it assured me that they would not have a negative disposition about poetry or our class and that learning could safely continue.

My supervising teacher was extremely supportive during this episode, and she was able to relay assurance to administrators that the situation was under control in the classroom. She also helped me to figure out how to proceed in the aftermath of the initial test, without so much as an “I told you so!” This kind of situation could occur in anyone's classroom, but being able to go through it as a kind of “baptism of fire” during my student teaching experience was very helpful.

I was able to experience firsthand the importance of classroom morale, the importance of preparing my students for tests, and the experience of dealing with an entire class failing a test. Entering a classroom for the first time can be intimidating enough, without immediately being put in charge of one. I felt very positively about my student teaching experience because it built confidence in me and allowed me to try and fail with the “safety net” of having an experienced teacher in the classroom right there with me.

**Teacher Action Research**

This study demonstrated to me the value of teacher action research, especially for a student teacher. Teacher action research has the potential to help teachers to reflect on their own practice and to help them shape changes that need to be made in order for them to be of greater benefit to their students and grow as teachers. Instead of relying on the results of one standardized exam, studies like mine can uncover results that can be measured in terms of reportable numbers and can describe an entire unit. The data analysis in my study demonstrated student growth over time, and it allowed me to see what assessments best demonstrated my students' learning. In this case, I was able to measure analytical skills, knowledge of poetic conventions, and, especially significant, student attitudes towards poetry.

My study was particularly effective as a tool of self-evaluation; it enabled me to read student feedback, the results of which I would not have guessed, even with my knowledge of student performance of graded assessments. For example, Brenda's feedback helped me to see that her problem performing on some of my assessments may have had to do with a difficulty for her in answering free-response questions. She shared, “I have trouble explaining anything, even if I understand it.” This may have
resulted in her not answering the pretest questions as fully as she might have been able to. Clearly, by the time she gave her presentation in class she knew much more and was able to share her learning better, because she had prepared what she was going to say. Being able to tap student evaluations of my teaching and their learning was very helpful, and helped to motivate me to try classroom research as a regular teacher.

This study also demonstrated that my teaching appealed most to students in the second highest cluster. As the result of my research, I now know that my instruction tends to lean in the direction of students like Olivia, students in a high middle range. If I want to increase learning gains across the board, I will have to ask some new questions about my own instruction. To find out what I am doing that helps those learners in particular and to discover how to appeal to and push students who fall into different ranges, such as the Gifted or those who struggle most, will be a new area of research for me. Researching my own practice has helped me to step back and see my instruction from a different angle and I feel it will ultimately benefit my students and their growth.

**Testing and Accountability to Stakeholders**

In situating this study (Section 1), one of the educational dilemmas I addressed has been the increased desire for accountability in our schools. After teaching in an AP environment, I can see how some of this applies to me and to my effectiveness in the classroom. I believe teacher action research has the potential to demonstrate gains in the classroom and suggest new and important issues for investigation. The aim of accountability is a good one. We as educational professionals are public servants. As such, I think we should be able to demonstrate well the results of our instruction.

In an AP classroom, students are not required to take the exam, but their enrollment and scores are used by schools to advertise their respective AP programs. This means that AP teachers are held accountable for higher “production” of passing scores. My effectiveness as an AP teacher would in no small part be judged on the basis of these scores. I do believe that those scores are important, insofar as students often take the classes in hopes of obtaining college credit. To ignore the exam and not teach students how to pass the exams would be doing them a disservice and ignoring the aims of the students and parents I intend to serve. I do not feel that my instruction was ineffective just because part of it was spent teaching skills and knowledge that would be helpful on the AP exam.
In speaking with Derek after the exam, he said he felt confident when writing essays and answering questions on poetry on the AP exam. This is the kind of effectiveness I set out to accomplish, and I have little doubt that Derek achieved the score he worked so hard to attain. Teacher action research is a tool for investigating problems in our methodology or the learning environment. The fact that I can demonstrate proof of my claims gives me a voice beyond mere numbers. To be sure, high-stakes scores are important, but they represent individual students in individual classrooms, who need their teachers to practice reflective study of their own teaching in order to serve them best. If accountability encourages such growth and such practices, then it should be welcomed in our classrooms.

**AP Course Content and Teaching Practices**

Because of this study and time spent in an AP classroom, I became aware of issues I had not previously perceived. The first involves the rapid pace of the AP Literature and Composition class. The poetry unit was the longest I taught, and took my students and I over a month to complete. At least part of that time was cut short by days when the school was administering the FCAT (Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test). Because we had so little time, for example, students went through the Barron’s book, which contained explanations of many of the terms they were expected to know, on their own.

Covering a few centuries’ worth of poetry and poetic conventions was really challenging, and I often felt that we weren’t spending enough time talking about scansion or figurative language or any one of the great poets to whose work we paid brief homage. I regretted not spending more time explaining some of the terminology. Several students reported on Question #4 of the posttest that they still did not feel confident with scansion, and while I offered after school or lunch time help, many of them were too busy with jobs, externships, or activities to take me up on it. Thankfully, according to my supervising teacher, scansion does not appear very frequently on the AP exam, but I wish I could have done more to help my students.

We did not spend an inordinate amount of time “drilling” AP exam questions during the poetry unit, but we did spend several periods administering practice exams at other times. I regretted using the looming specter of the approaching exam as one of my motivations for the class to keep the pace up for their reading in *Sound and Sense*, because I felt that the study of poetry is intrinsically motivating enough. While AP
Literature attracted some amazing students because of the possibility of earning college credit, I felt that I should have motivated them less with the promise of high scores, and more with reminders of why literature is intrinsically valuable. Spending too much time preparing for the exam and not enough time examining and enjoying the literature would be a shame when working with such able students.

**Critical Literary Theory**

Some teachers with whom I have spoken seem to have a disdain for theory (pedagogical, literary, or otherwise) and find it too high-minded to use it to make any application to their classrooms. In the case of the theoretical dilemma between New Criticism and Reader Response criticism (Section 2), I think the issues of how literature is taught and what aspects of literature are emphasized in the classroom are crucial to examine. The difference between the perspective of New Criticism, emphasizing atomistic examination of poetry in hopes of discovering “the (one) meaning,” and the perspective of Reader Response, which is concerned with the transaction that takes place as a reader connects with and makes meaning of a text, is seemingly disparate. In my classroom, I strove for a balance between the two paradigms, combining the skills of New Criticism’s close reading with Reader Response’s emphasis on personal meaning-making. However, I felt that sometimes my instruction emphasized technique and conventions at the expense of appreciation.

Student comments on Question #4 on the posttest most often mention technique, but students also make positive comments about appreciation too, something I had not expected. The emphasis on the components of poetry helped some students feel more proficient and authoritative when reading poetry, thus increasing enjoyment. In fact, the lure of “figuring out” a poem proved effective for these students, and their personal connection with the poem was enhanced. In feeling that they had a sufficient grasp on what the poem was trying to say, they were able to see how the poet had used technique to accentuate various facets of their work. This kind of appreciation was effectively taught almost without me being aware of it, and I was relieved to see the results in my students’ comments.

The tension between perspectives was also visible during Luis’s presentation (Section 3). I wondered if I should tell him the “right” meaning of the text, as learned through the New Critical perspective of the literature professors in my classes at the university, or let him try to find his own way, and guide his already present reading
skills to a conclusion based on his understanding of the text. I tried to cut a middle ground, knowing that my students would encounter both perspectives in their classes in the future, believing that both perspectives had something positive to offer my students. The New Critical perspective really is embedded in the construction of the AP exams that I have reviewed, and thus teaching from that perspective is somewhat unavoidable for the teacher who wants to prepare their students well for the exam. A teacher’s perspective on how literature should be studied and their theoretical views influence how students ultimately develop as readers of literature and inform the kind of instruction that takes place. During this unit, my perspective helped my students appreciate and understand poetry more and as a teacher, that is my primary concern.

**Student Needs**

It is part of my philosophy that student needs should be the center of my curriculum, and this study confirmed some of my thinking on student needs, provoking new thought as well. My experience with the oral presentations and the *Sound and Sense* / presentations test confirmed my thinking about preparing students well for assessments. Given the rubric in advance for the presentation, students knew exactly what was required in order to make an “A.” Because many of them are motivated by grades, this was an effective way of using an assessment to push them to learn. I enjoyed giving “A’s,” and giving the students the rubric ahead of time was a way to give everyone a chance to succeed, learning-wise and grade-wise. One of the complaints most loudly voiced by my students in the aftermath of the *Sound and Sense* / presentations test was that they felt ill-prepared by the review sheet. Being aware of what is expected of them on an assessment helped my students to succeed. Being well-prepared is a critical need of students and if I as a teacher want students to succeed and demonstrate what they know, then I must show them how.

Self-directed learners were a new consideration for me as a teacher. Self-directed learners like Chris learn information and skills beyond but related to the curriculum and may not have an opportunity to share their growth on assessments. It reminds me of the vast value of free-response questions, creative projects, and choices in learning, especially for Gifted students, who so often find their way into AP classes. I want to think about these students’ needs, so often hard to address because they are so far
ahead of other students’ understanding and because their interests would lead a class so far outside of the curriculum that is more essential for more students.

Assessing self-directed learners and measuring their gains would be difficult, unless they were allowed to be a part of curriculum choices, as in using contracts. What would the possibilities be for students in AP classes to design their own programs of study? Addressing the needs of many different types of learners simultaneously in the context of one class is one of the greatest challenges of teaching, but one that must be met if I am to give all students the opportunity to be challenged in my classes.

**Growth for the Future**

Part of the process of teacher action research (Wells, 1994), following interpretation, is the planning of an action based on the results of the research. My action plan concerns me as a teacher in general, as a teacher of poetry specifically, and as a researcher.

One improvement I could make in the area of instruction is preparing students better for tests. Student feedback on the *Sound and Sense* /presentations test indicated that many students did not feel well-prepared by the review beforehand. Poor performance on tests is the result of poor preparation by the teacher, the students, or both. Preparation should take place throughout the lessons being taught, and assessment of the learning along the way before a more heavily weighted test could reveal who needs help the most. I knew that the *Sound and Sense* test had gone awry when I saw that even those I knew were hard-working and had read and taken notes faithfully had done poorly. I had not been specific enough in terms of what they needed to know. In contrast, with the presentations I was able to explain to them beforehand exactly what they needed to know in order to score well.

In my future classrooms, a review will be designed to explain not only the format of the test but the content of the test as well, effectively allowing students to perform their best and demonstrate what they know. This would prevent a repeat of the kind of demoralizing experience that the students and I experienced in the aftermath of the poetry unit’s *Sound and Sense* test.
Also, I want to continue to include creative performance assessments in my instruction. The poetry presentations were successful and effective in tapping student knowledge, because students knew what it took to make an “A” and they met the criteria through their hard work. Students responded very well affectively to this and other creative assessments and seemed to enjoy the presentations in class, especially if the presenters managed to work in some kind of refreshments! The presentations also allowed students to be the constructors of the knowledge in the classroom and gave them equal “air time,” creating a feeling that this was our class instead of my class or my supervising teacher’s class.

One of the aims of my teaching is to succeed with as many different kinds of learners as possible. Cluster analysis revealed that my instruction mainly targeted those in the second-highest cluster. I will need to find out what works well for students in other segments of my classroom population. Part of the challenge of having self-directed learners like Chris in my classes will be keeping them from being bored as I direct the other students in the class, who may not perform as well as they do. Giving self-directed students additional assignments hardly seems fair, but perhaps giving them special direction on class assignments that would point them towards their interests in learning would be helpful to them. Giving them opportunity to be assessed in their areas of growth, as opposed to assessing them exclusively according to the material I am presenting to the rest of the class, would show me what they are achieving. Allowing students to set goals for themselves might ensure their investment in their learning.

In terms of poetry instruction, if I could revise the unit, I would approach a few things differently. First, I would achieve a better balance between outside reading and homework. Students were required to do a great deal of outside reading and some of them did very little. This did not produce the kinds of gains in terms of knowledge, skill, or affect that I had wanted. Daily quizzes made sure that a few more of them at least cracked the book, but I question the value of reading chapter after chapter of *Sound and Sense* with little review or direct use of some of that material in class. I think spending more time looking at those concepts in class and reading poetry aloud with students, working on skills together as we did in the inquiry groups, would produce more gains. It would also produce less student frustration and might reduce the number of “guilt trip” speeches I had to give them. When my most diligent students
fail to complete a reading assignment, it could mean I have assigned too much. I think building reading skills through directed inquiry in class will be helpful in learning how to read poetry more effectively and being able to make more meaning by reading it. I think looking at fewer poems and examining them more in-depth would allow my students to truly grasp and “own” more poems than reading through a larger number of poems.

The monumental number of poetic terms I required students to memorize was largely forgettable knowledge for them unless they used some of those terms in their presentations. Terms like “imagery,” “metonymy,” and “rhyme scheme” are far more universally applicable in the study of poetry than are specific forms such as “epithalamion,” “dirge,” or “threnody.” Although such words are impressive terms to be able to handle effectively in analytic writing, they are less essential than knowing the building blocks of poetry well. Various types of figurative language or sensory imagery comprise those larger forms, and perhaps leading up to forms by looking at smaller components of poetry first would make their study more interesting and memorable.

As a researcher, I have learned how important it is to administer assessments properly when basing research on the results. I feel that my study would have revealed much more if I had encouraged students to write more than they did on their pre- and posttests. Leading student understanding of my research instrument would have helped them produce results more in keeping with their actual capabilities. In the future, I will instruct my subjects more clearly and let them know what I expect.

Questions for Further Research

Based on these findings and my new action plan, I have new questions:

1. How do I, as a teacher, accommodate self-directed learners in the classroom, especially when the classroom is filled with different types of learners? Self-directed learners are drawn to learning, but their interests do not always lie within the bounds of the curriculum. Projects such as the presentation in this unit allowed for more self-directed inquiry and for creativity, but continuing to seek creative solutions in curriculum development and instruction will yield even greater benefits for these learners.
2. *How do I, as a teacher, best increase confidence in learners?* Confidence was one of the major factors in terms of demonstrating learning gains. For some learners, a step-by-step approach would build the confidence that my students gained. In learners whose primary strength is their diligence, how can I, as an instructor, discover the difference between a lack of confidence and a lack of knowledge? Finding ways to increase the confidence of my learners, especially when approaching a very intimidating standardized test, is important. However, I question the method of gaining confidence at the expense of “coaching” and teaching “test-busting” techniques, as opposed to instilling real knowledge and skills during instruction. How can I increase confidence without “drilling” my students endlessly and making them take what is probably not a thrilling test many times before they take it for real credit?

3. *How do I, as an instructor, better gear my instruction to reach learners of all styles and levels?* Why did my instruction most impact the students in Cluster #2? Was it just the assessment measuring their particular type of learning best? What could I have done to increase the gains in the lower two clusters?

4. *How can I increase appreciation of poetry?* I know that my students did enjoy poetry more in some cases, but I felt that there was probably a lot more I could have done to help my students appreciate poetry. Did I need to pack all the instruction into one “poetry unit” or could I have spread it out more so that it would be less intense all at once? I noted that many of my students seemed drained by the end of the unit, yet they had much more to do by the end of the year. Could spacing poetry instruction out have helped my students to appreciate it more? What other sorts of activities could I have had them do that might have increased their enjoyment of this unit?

5. *What is the value of other types of writing in the AP classroom?* In reviewing the literature on poetry instruction, writing poetry received a lot of attention. I would consider writing poetry as one way to teach not only appreciation, but technique and analysis through experiencing it firsthand. However, AP curriculum, to my understanding, stresses expository and analytical writing so much so that it would be difficult to justify much of a detour. Does AP stress expository and analytical writing to the point of excluding and thus possibly downplaying the value of other types of creative writing?
Conclusion

“What we call the beginning is often the end
And to make an end is to make a beginning.
The end is where we start from…”
-- T.S. Eliot, “Little Gidding,” from Four
Quartets (as in Ellmann & O’Clair, 1988)

In teacher action research, Eliot’s words ring true. Reflecting on the effectiveness of my practice leads me to more questions than I had when I began. Those questions will push me further as a teacher of English and of poetry and will cause me to seek out methods that benefit all my students. The effectiveness of my instruction in this unit will become the foundation as I use the results of this research for the benefit of my next students. Students will always inspire me to push my craft further and to make each end a better beginning.
APPENDIX A

UNIT TIMELINE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Assignment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Prior to Winter Break</strong></td>
<td>1994 AP exam given, essays are scored. “Helen” / “To Helen” essay is collected in this batch of work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/6/04</td>
<td>Barron’s poetry section assigned, in-class reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/9/04</td>
<td>Barron’s in-class reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/10/04</td>
<td>• Assigned “Laws of Life” essay (unrelated to unit)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Scansion review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/11/04</td>
<td>Poetry terms and scansion test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/12/04</td>
<td>• Turn in “Laws of Life” essay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Hand out TP(P)-CASTT guide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Discuss Literary Periods handout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/13/04</td>
<td>• Discussed John Donne’s “The Computation” using TP(P)-CASTT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Handed out poetry presentation sheets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/16/04</td>
<td>• In-class discussion of <em>Sound and Sense</em>, Ch. 1 and 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Poetry logs assigned (Name, Title of poem, Literary Period)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/17/04</td>
<td>• Discussed Shakespearean sonnet form using “When My Love Swears That She is Made of Truth”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Quiz on Ch. 1 + 2, <em>Sound and Sense</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>2/18/04</td>
<td>• In-class discussion of <em>Sound and Sense</em>, Ch. 4 and 5</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Inquiry groups assigned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Poems used:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Emily Dickinson, “A Narrow Fellow in the Grass”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Philip Larkin, “Toads”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Thomas Hardy, “Convergence of the Twain”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. John Keats, “To Autumn”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/19/04</td>
<td>• Inquiry groups continue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• <em>Sound and Sense</em>, Ch. 6 and 7 completed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/20/04</td>
<td>• Inquiry groups continue and conclude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• <em>Sound and Sense</em>, Ch. 6 and 7 completed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Poetry Presentation Evaluation Rubric explained</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/23/04</td>
<td>• Poetry Presentations in class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• All week: complete Ch. 11-14 in <em>Sound and Sense</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Assignment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/24/04</td>
<td>Poetry Presentations continue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/25/04</td>
<td>Poetry Presentations continue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/26/04</td>
<td>Poetry Presentations continue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/27/04</td>
<td>Poetry Presentations continue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/1/04</td>
<td>• Poetry Presentations conclude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Pass out and review poetry test guide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/2/04</td>
<td>FCAT Testing—no class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/3/04</td>
<td>FCAT Testing—no class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/4/04</td>
<td>• <em>Sound and Sense</em>/Poetry Presentations test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Assign Comparison and Contrast essay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/5/04</td>
<td>Discuss test with students, collect feedback on unit and test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/8/04</td>
<td>FCAT Testing—no class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/9/04</td>
<td>In-class Poetry Reading: Bring in a favorite poem and share with class for extra credit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/10/04</td>
<td>FCAT Testing—no class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/11/04</td>
<td>• <em>Sound and Sense</em>/Poetry Presentations retest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Comparison and Contrast essay due</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Share poem “The Usherette”</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Table B.1: Lesson Rationales

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lesson</th>
<th>Rationale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1994 AP Exam, “Helen”/“To Helen”</td>
<td>This exam was given as a semester exam in December 2003 before the internship began. The comparison/contrast essay on Edgar Allen Poe’s “To Helen” and “Helen” became a useful “before” assessment once the Comparison/Contrast essay was assigned.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barron’s reading/test</td>
<td>The students had been working in Barron’s AP English during the year, and were familiar with its form. Its comprehensive list of terms and good demonstrations of analytic writing were the best among the AP study guides on the market. We determined to spend as little time with terminology as possible and move right into looking at poems. Making students responsible for their own learning was part of the objective of making this part of the unit self-study. Students had encountered many of these terms in previous English classes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scansion review</td>
<td>Many students requested a review of scansion before the test, and felt shaky on picking up the rhythms of poetry. Scansion was included because it is part of poetic form that could be discussed in analytic writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP(P)-CASTT handout</td>
<td>This is the standard method of poetry analysis at Chiles High, particularly at the AP Lit level. It was used because of its concise method of moving through an analysis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literary periods handout</td>
<td>This handout was given students to emphasize the idea that poems are a product of and often fit into a historical context.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poetry Logs</td>
<td>These logs were supposed to make sure that students were paying attention to the names of poets and poems they were reading, including the literary period they best fit into.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Donne’s “The Computation” lesson</td>
<td>This lesson was given the day before Valentine’s Day, and was chosen because of its relation to the theme of love. It proved to be a good poem to demonstrate TP(P)-CASTT with, and also introduced the concept of the metaphysical conceit. One of the poems that gave students problems on the multiple choice section of the 1994 AP Exam that was taken as a semester exam was by Abraham Cowley, one of Donne’s fellow metaphysical poets, so this was aimed at helping students to grow in their understanding of these poets.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sound and Sense/quizzes</td>
<td>This book was used not only to reiterate poetic technique concepts, but also to expose students to many examples of the kinds of poems found on the AP Exam, and to expose them to much rich poetry from different eras. The quizzes were given to assess if students had been reading this material.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson</td>
<td>Rationale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explication of sonnet form</td>
<td>This was one of the few forms we spent time with in class, as it is one of the most popular poetic forms. Typical patterns of sonnet construction, with their common associations, were addressed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inquiry groups</td>
<td>This group activity was designed to give students a chance to grow in their analytical skills without a grade hanging over them, and with a group of peers to help to flesh out their thoughts. The poems chosen were representative of the kind of poems that students often struggle with on the AP. It was hoped that going through them as a class would give them some good practice with this sort of challenging poetry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poetry Presentations</td>
<td>This assignment was the heart and soul of the unit, giving students a chance to teach each other and share their readings of some classic poems. Poems were chosen from a list, and presentations were made in class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review Guide for <em>Sound and Sense</em> / Presentations Test</td>
<td>This was meant to direct students to the parts of <em>Sound and Sense</em> they needed to familiarize themselves with, as well as to key them in on what sort of things would be tested from the presentations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Sound and Sense</em> / Presentations Test</td>
<td>This test was designed to show which students had been paying attention to the presentations, and to measure their understanding of the concepts in <em>Sound and Sense</em>, through definitions and application questions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback</td>
<td>This was an informal assessment by the students of their own learning progress, as well as my effectiveness as a teacher, following their near-revolt over the test.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poetry Reading</td>
<td>This extra-credit activity was designed to improve morale, and alleviate disenchantment with poetry after a very troubling response to the test. Students were encouraged to bring in a poem they enjoyed to share with the class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Sound and Sense</em> / Presentations Retest</td>
<td>The retest was to provide a better measurement of student progress with poetry analysis, and their understanding of the presentations. The test was constructed so that they could show us what they knew as opposed to what they did not. It augmented the scores from the first test, and replaced a section that nearly no one did well on (including students who had studied for hours).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparison/Contrast Paper</td>
<td>Assignment showed not only what students knew about analytical essay writing, but what students could do when they weren’t under a 40 minute time restriction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Usherette” presentation</td>
<td>Another activity designed to increase morale in the aftermath of the test. I shared some of my own verse, coupled with the painting that inspired it. Students were able to address the question of authorial intent directly, after they learned that the poem was one of mine. Villanelle form was also brought into the discussion. This activity was meant mainly to create a “safe” classroom atmosphere and for me to give students a “positive stroke” by sharing something of myself.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX C

CLASS ASSESSMENT SCORES

Table C.1: Assessment Scores for 3rd Period Class

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Pretest</th>
<th>Posttest</th>
<th>Gains made</th>
<th>“Helen”/”To Helen” Essay</th>
<th>Sound and Sense essay</th>
<th>Poetry Presentation</th>
<th>Barron's Terms/Scansion</th>
<th>Sound and Sense Test/Retest</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CHRIS</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>8/9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>89</td>
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<tr>
<td>GLENNNA</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>8/9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>40+60=100</td>
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<td>131</td>
<td>67</td>
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<td>DEREK</td>
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<td>218</td>
<td>173</td>
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<td>8/9</td>
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<td>KEVIN</td>
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<td>130</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4/5</td>
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<tr>
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<td>145</td>
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<tr>
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<td>99</td>
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<td>30+47=77</td>
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<tr>
<td>QUENTIN</td>
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<td>150</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>7/8</td>
<td>8/9</td>
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<td>100</td>
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<td>130</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>6/7</td>
<td>8/9</td>
<td>99</td>
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<tr>
<td>JULIE</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>5/6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>61</td>
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<tr>
<td>BRENDA</td>
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<td>99</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>4/5</td>
<td>4/5</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>37+51=88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HANNAH</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>5/6</td>
<td>7/8</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>33+59=92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX D

UNIT PRETEST

Poetry Unit Questionnaire

1. Please define the following terms:
   A. iambic pentameter
   B. ballad
   C. villanelle
   D. personification

2. Please read the following poem. Circle each device or convention you see and name it if you can. Write a few sentences about the poem, responding in any mode you choose.

   “Ozymandius”
   I met a traveler from an antique land
   Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
   Stand in the desert. Near them, the sand,
   Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
   And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
   Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
   Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
   The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed;
   And on a pedestal these words appear:
   “My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
   Look on my works, ye Mighty and despair!”
   Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
   Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
   The lone and level sands stretch far away.
   --P. B. Shelley

3. What are some of your favorite poems, or some poems you have read?

4. Please tell me anything else about poetry you’d like to mention.
APPENDIX E

POSTTEST

Poetry Unit Questionnaire

1. Please define the following terms:
   A. iambic pentameter

   B. ballad

   C. villanelle

   D. personification

2. Please read the following poem. Circle each device or convention you see and name it if you can. Write a few sentences about the poem, responding in any mode you choose.

   “Ozymandius”
   I met a traveler from an antique land
   Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
   Stand in the desert. Near them, the sand,
   Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
   And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
   Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
   Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
   The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed;
   And on a pedestal these words appear:
   “My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
   Look on my works, ye Mighty and despair!”
   Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
   Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
   The lone and level sands stretch far away.
   --P. B. Shelley

3. What are some of your favorite poems, or poems you have read? Please write a sentence about each describing why you do/do not enjoy it.

4. Please tell me anything you learned during this poetry unit, or anything else you’d like to say about poetry.
Sound and Sense/Poetry Presentations Test: Study Sheet

Your test will be broken up into two major sections. The first will be a matching section, featuring information about all of the poems on your poetry presentation. The second will be a series of short answer questions. Some will be definitions, which you must supply with a concise answer, as well as an example from a poem in Sound and Sense. Here is an example:

Simile- a comparison of two objects or terms using “like” or “as.” Tom Dacre’s hair is like a lamb’s in “The Chimney Sweep.”

Note how the example demonstrates a simile. If you are asked to define a poetic form pattern, you will only be asked to cite the name of the poem as an example. If you are given a concept like “tone” or “figurative language” you should be able to give an example of a poem and how it uses those concepts. Elizabeth Bishop’s “Sestina” has a melancholy tone, while Emily Dickinson’s “It sifts from leaden sieves” uses much figurative language in its discussion of snow.

The final set of short-answer questions will offer you a short selection from a poem and ask you questions about it, prompting you to analyze its technique and how the poet creates meaning.

You should review the following:

1. You should know all of the poems from the presentations well (as well as ones on the gray presentation assignment sheet that may not have been covered by your classmates). You should be familiar with the poet’s name, title of their poem, and biographical information about the poet. You should also be aware of the salient literary features of each poem, and have a basic gist of what each is about. If you were taking good notes during the presentations, this will not present much difficulty.

2. You should be familiar with all terms used in Sound and Sense and know their definitions, as well as a good example of each from the poems in the book or from our presentations. Anything from Chapters 1,2, and 4-14 is fair game. You would do well to scan these chapters and make sure you understand the concepts therein.

3. You should be knowledgeable of different types of figurative language and how they are used, being able to differentiate between them. For example, you should know the difference between metonymy and synecdoche and the differences between the several types of irony.

4. Brush up on your scansion with Chapter 12 and 13 in Sound and Sense, as well as your knowledge of the form patterns in Chapter 14.

The objective of this test is not to present information in tricky ways, or to quiz you on arcane snippets of knowledge, but to verify how conversant you are with poetic technique and to test your ability to use your knowledge of it to help you analyze a poem for meaning. Hopefully this study sheet will help you study effectively for the exam and assuage any premature anxiety. If you know your stuff, this test should not be a problem.

--Regards,
Mr. Brannon
Sound and Sense / Poetry Presentations Test

I. Matching Please write the letter corresponding to the poet’s name that best fits each statement below. Each name corresponds to only one question, so use process of elimination if you need to. (2 pts. each)

A. Samuel Taylor Coleridge  J. William Blake
B. Dylan Thomas  K. John Keats
C. Robert Frost  L. William Wordsworth
D. W.H. Auden  M. Dudley Randall
E. Elizabeth Bishop  N. John Donne
F. Henry Reed  O. e.e. cummings
G. Robert Browning  P. Margaret Atwood
H. Emily Dickinson  Q. Walt Whitman
I. Langston Hughes

1. This African-American poet wrote a ballad about a race-related crime in the Southern United States.

2. This reclusive American poet wrote a poem about a journey with Death.

3. The poem we studied by this poet features two stanzas, two characters, and “two hearts beating each to each.”

4. This American Romantic poet wrote a poem about attending a lecture, and the speaker’s experience afterwards.

5. This British Romantic poet wrote a poem about a character who decrees a “sunny pleasure dome” which symbolizes the act of poetic creation.

6. This Metaphysical poet wrote seduction poems, and later in life, religious verse, using “conceits.”

7. This American Modernist poet once wrote a poem about bending trees.

8. This British poet was in the military for several months and wrote his/her most famous poem about a drill instructor telling cadets about the assembly of their rifles.

9. This poem we studied by this poet is written in a French verse form that features six sestets and a final tercet.
10. This British Romantic poet, also the author of the ode “To Autumn”, wrote an ode which features an apostrophe to a piece of pottery.

11. The poem we studied by this poet, more famous for his/her novels than poetry, has an unreliable speaker who is a character from Greek mythology.

12. This Romantic poet’s works often deal with themes of memory and solitude in Nature.

13. This British poet wrote a poem in which the speaker only knows information about its subject secondhand.

14. This Welsh poet, who unfortunately died of alcoholism, wrote a poem about youth using the name of a favorite childhood haunt in the title.

15. This British Romantic poet was an engraver who actually made his/her own books.

16. This Harlem Renaissance poet’s poems feature the rhythms of blues and jazz.

17. This poet eschews “normal” punctuation in his poem about an uncle who just can’t seem to win in life until, ironically, he dies.

II. Short Answer

For questions 18-21, please define each term as fully as possible and be able to give a specific example from Sound and Sense. (ex. Simile- a comparison using “like” or “as.” Tom Dacre’s hair is like a lamb’s in “The Chimney Sweep.”) (5 pts. each)

18. metonymy

19. allusion

20. Italian (Petrarchan) sonnet

21. dramatic irony

For questions 22-24, read the following excerpt and write a short answer to each question.

The winter evening settles down
With smell of steaks in passageways.
Six o’clock.
The burnt-out ends of smoky days.
And now a gusty shower wraps
The grimy scraps
Of withered leaves about your feet
And newspapers from vacant lots;
The showers beat
On broken blinds and chimney-pots,
And at the corner of the street
A lonely cab-horse steams and stamps.

And then the lighting of the lamps.

*From “Preludes” by T.S. Eliot*

22. Identify five different instances of imagery used by the poet, and state which senses they appeal to. (10 pts.)

23. Identify the meter used in lines 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, and 10-14. (Hint: It’s the same meter!) (10 pts.)

24. What tone do these images create within the poem? How does the poet use these images to create this tone? Please write your answer in the form of a paragraph, using pertinent examples from the text. (25 pts.)
I. Presentation Information.

Select five of the poems below that we covered in class. For each poem you select, list pertinent factual information from the presentation that was given in your class. This information might be biographical information, information from the TP-CASTT of the poem, a quick synopsis of the poem, the form of the poem, etc. You will be scored on the quality of the information given, and you should have no less than five facts per poem.

- Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s “Kubla Khan”
- W.H. Auden’s “Unknown Citizen”
- Elizabeth Bishop’s “Sestina”
- Henry Reed’s “Naming of Parts”
- Robert Browning’s “Meeting at Night”
- Emily Dickinson’s “Because I Could Not Stop For Death”
- William Blake’s “The Chimney Sweeper”
- William Wordsworth’s “Solitary Reaper”
- John Donne’s “The Flea”
- e.e. cummings’ “nobody loses all the time”
- Margaret Atwood’s “Siren Song”
- Walt Whitman’s “When I Heard the Learn’d Astronomer”
- Langston Hughes’ “The Weary Blues” and “Dream Deferred”
- Dudley Randall’s “Ballad of Birmingham”

II. Multiple Choice.

The following questions will test your knowledge of the concepts in Sound and Sense. Please pay careful attention to each question and select the best response.

For questions 6-8, please read the following poem and choose the best response from those presented.

When my mother died I was very young,
And my father sold me while yet my tongue
Could scarcely cry "'weep! 'weep! 'weep! 'weep!"
So your chimneys I sweep, and in soot I sleep. 4

There's little Tom Dacre, who cried when his head,
That curl'd like a lamb's back, was shav'd, so I said
"Hush, Tom! never mind it, for when your head's bare
You know that the soot cannot spoil your white hair." 8

And so he was quiet, and that very night
As Tom was a-sleeping, he had such a sight!
That thousands of sweepers, Dick, Joe, Ned, and Jack,
Were all of them lock'd up in coffins of black. 12
And by came an Angel who had a bright key,
And he open’d the coffins and set them all free;
Then down a green plain leaping, laughing, they run,
And wash in a river, and shine in the sun. 16

Then naked and white, all their bags left behind,
They rise upon clouds and sport in the wind;
And the Angel told Tom, if he’d be a good boy,
He’d have God for his father, and never want joy. 20

And so Tom awoke, and we rose in the dark,
And got with our bags and our brushes to work.
Though the morning was cold, Tom was happy and warm;
So if all do their duty they need not fear harm. 24

6. The account of Tom’s dream in lines 9-20 is a good example of
   A. symbolic language.
   B. personification.
   C. a paradoxical situation.
   D. understatement.

7. The type of irony found in the last stanza of the poem would be best described as
   A. situational irony.
   B. structural irony.
   C. dramatic irony.
   D. verbal irony.

8. In lines 5 and 6, Tom’s hair is compared to a lamb’s back. In addition to being a simile, this could be
   A. an example of understatement used to create situational irony.
   B. a biblical allusion to sacrificial lambs.
   C. an example of personification, in which lambs are personified.
   D. an apostrophe to the employer of the chimney sweeps.

For questions 9-10, please read the following poem and choose the best response from those presented.

This is the one song everyone
would like to learn: the song
that is irresistible: 3

the song that forces men
to leap overboard in squadrons
even though they see the beached skulls 6

the song nobody knows
because anyone who has heard it
is dead, and the others can’t remember. 9
Shall I tell you the secret
and if I do, will you get me
out of this bird suit?

I don't enjoy it here
squatting on this island
looking picturesque and mythical

with these two feathery maniacs,
I don't enjoy singing
this trio, fatal and valuable.

I will tell the secret to you,
to you, only to you.
Come closer. This song

is a cry for help: Help me!
Only you, only you can,
you are unique

At last. Alas
it is a boring song
but it works every time.

9. In lines 10-12 the speaker in this poem is
   A. making reference to an allusion to Greek mythology that is used throughout
      the poem.
   B. continuing an apostrophe that is used throughout the poem.
   C. using synecdoche to figuratively describe her condition.
   D. establishing an extended metaphor which compares “secrets” to the “men”
      mentioned in line 4.

10. The statement “you are unique” in line 24 is primarily
    A. paradoxical.
    B. ironic.
    C. an understatement.
    D. allegorical.
APPENDIX I

STUDENT FEEDBACK QUESTIONS

Feedback

1. What part of the content have you learned best in the poetry unit?
2. What part of the content have you struggled with the most?
3. Did you read all of Barron’s? Sound and Sense?
4. Were they helpful, even if you didn’t like them? Which parts were helpful?
5. Did going through poems in class help you understand how to analyze a poem?
6. About what percent of the concepts in Barron’s and Sound and Sense do you feel you understand well enough to explain them? What do you still need work on?
7. What can I do as an instructor to help you learn?
8. On a scale of 1-10 (10 being the worst), how bad is your case of senioritis?
APPENDIX J

“HELEN” / “TO HELEN” PROMPT FROM 1994 ADVANCED PLACEMENT LITERATURE AND COMPOSITION EXAM

The following two poems are about Helen of Troy. Renowned in the ancient world for her beauty, Helen was the wife of Menelaus, a Greek king. She was carried off to Troy by the Trojan prince Paris, and her abduction was the immediate cause of the Trojan War.

Read the two poems carefully. Considering such elements as speaker, diction, imagery, form, and tone, write a well-organized essay in which you contrast the speakers’ views of Helen.
SOUND AND SENSE COMPARISON/CONTRAST ESSAY PROMPT

On page 20 of Sound and Sense, refer to Question #1. Analyze by comparison and contrast one of the pairs of poems with reference to figurative language, tone, diction, and meaning.

Use specific references to the poems. Use word indicators so that the reader can clearly see your organization.
APPENDIX L

SOUND AND SENSE COMPARISON/CONTRAST ESSAY RUBRIC

8-9 These well-organized and mechanically sound essays clearly demonstrate an understanding of the poems and the thematic material they compare and contrast. With apt and specific references, they discuss how figurative language, tone and diction are used to shape meaning, and compare the two poems effectively. Though not without flaws, these papers will offer convincing interpretations of poems and consistent control over the “virtues” of effective composition and the techniques of comparative and contrastive analysis. They demonstrate the writers’ ability to read perceptively and to write with clarity and sophistication.

6-7 These essays also demonstrate an understanding of the poems, but compared to the best essays, they are less thorough, or less precise in comparing and contrasting the views of the two poems with respect to figurative language, tone and diction. In addition to minor flaws in interpretation, their analysis is likely to be briefer, less well-supported and less incisive. These essays demonstrate the writers’ ability to express ideas clearly, but with less mastery and control over the hallmarks of exposition than do papers in the 8-9 range.

5 These essays are, at best, superficial. Their handling of the elements in the prompt may be vague, mechanical, or inadequately supported. They deal with the assigned task without important errors, but have little to say beyond the most obvious and easy to grasp. Though aware of such elements as figurative language, tone, and diction, they deal with them in the most cursory way. While the writing is sufficient to convey the writer’s thoughts, these essays are typically pedestrian, not as well-conceived, organized, or developed as the upper-half papers. Often they reveal simplistic thinking and/or immature writing.

3-4 These lower-half essays reflect and incomplete understanding of one of the poems. Typically, they fail to respond adequately to part or parts of the prompt. The treatment of figurative language, tone, and diction may be weak, meager, or irrelevant. Their use of comparative/contrastive analysis may be inaccurate or unclear. The writing demonstrates uncertain control over the elements of college-level composition. These essays usually contain recurrent stylistic flaws and/or misreadings and lack persuasive evidence from the text. Essays scored 3 exhibit more than one of the above infelicities; they are marred by significant misinterpretations, insufficient development, or serious omissions.

1-2 These essays compound the weaknesses of the papers in the 3-4 range. They may seriously misread one or both of the poems. Frequently, they are unacceptably brief. They are poorly written on several counts, and may contain many distracting mechanical errors and misusage of language. While some attempt may have been made to answer the question, the writer’s observations are presented with little clarity, organization, or supporting evidence.

0 This is a response with no more than a reference to the task.

- Indicates a blank response, or is completely off-topic.
APPENDIX M

POETRY PRESENTATION ASSIGNMENT

Instructions: In pairs, students will select a poem and prepare a class presentation. The presentation should include the following:

- An oral interpretation reading to the class
- Identification of the form of the poem (sonnet, villanelle, ode, etc.)
- The characteristics of the form (including scansion)
- A BRIEF biography of the author and the date the poem was written or published
- Discussion of the poem using the TP(P)-CASTT method of poetry analysis (refer to handout)
- A visual for the poem in the form of artwork, overhead transparency, or poster, which reinforces the most important aspects of the poem

Presentations should be 15-20 minutes long.

Notes should be taken during class discussion and presentations.

Prior to the beginning of the presentations, students should read and study the following chapters in Sound and Sense:

- Chapter 4- Imagery, p. 54
- Chapter 5- Figurative Language, p. 67
- Chapter 6- Figurative Language, p. 88
- Chapter 7- Figurative Language, p. 109
- Chapter 8- Allusion, p. 130
- Chapter 9- Meaning and Idea, p. 142
- Chapter 10- Tone, p. 155
- Chapter 12 (Optional Review if needed)- Rhythm and Meter, p. 187
- Chapter 14- Pattern, p. 231

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poems for Presentation</th>
<th>Poet</th>
<th>Book</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. “Kubla Khan”</td>
<td>Samuel Taylor Coleridge</td>
<td>SS 339</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. “Unknown Citizen”</td>
<td>W.H. Auden</td>
<td>SS 122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. “Sestina”</td>
<td>Elizabeth Bishop</td>
<td>D 687</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. “Naming of Parts”</td>
<td>Henry Reed</td>
<td>SS 48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. “Meeting at Night”</td>
<td>Robert Browning</td>
<td>SS 55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. “Because I could not stop for Death”</td>
<td>Emily Dickinson</td>
<td>SS 209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. “Chimney Sweeper”</td>
<td>William Blake</td>
<td>SS 117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. “Ode on a Grecian Urn”</td>
<td>John Keats</td>
<td>SS 268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. “Solitary Reaper”</td>
<td>William Wordsworth</td>
<td>SS 402</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. “Ballad of Birmingham”</td>
<td>Dudley Randall</td>
<td>SS 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. “nobody loses all the time”</td>
<td>e.e. cummings</td>
<td>Handout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. “Siren Song”</td>
<td>Margaret Atwood</td>
<td>SS 333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. “When I Heard the Learn’d Astronomer”</td>
<td>Walt Whitman</td>
<td>SS 399</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX N

POETRY PRESENTATION RUBRIC

___ Oral interpretation of poem (10 pts.)
___ Identification of form and characteristics (10 pts.)
___ Scansion of poem (10 pts.)
___ Biographical information/ date of publication (10 pts.)
___ Poster/3-D visual (10 pts.)
___ Presentation organized and ready when due (10 pts.)

______ Subtotal (60)

TP(P)-CASTT Analysis

___ Title
   (5 pts.)
___ Paraphrase
   (5 pts.)
___ Perspective (identity, reliability, formality, etc. of speaker)
   (5 pts.)
___ Craft (Literary devices such as alliteration, assonance, enjambment, caesura;
   Rhetorical devices such as anaphora, hyperbole, litotes; Structural devices such as
   scansion, form [villanelle, sonnet, rondeau, etc.] and rhyme scheme [ex. abab cdcd
efef gg])
   (5 pts.)
___ Attitude (tone)
   (5 pts.)
___ Shifts (in meaning, mood, subject, attitude, theme, form, etc.)
   (5 pts.)
___ Title interpretation and analysis
   (5 pts.)
___ Themes (literal and abstract meanings of the poem)
   (5 pts.)

______ Subtotal (40)

_________ OVERALL TOTAL (100 pts.)
APPENDIX O

TP(P)-CASTT POETRY ANALYSIS METHOD

TP-CASTT

(Title, Paraphrase [and Perspective], Craft, Attitude, Shifts, Title, Theme)
Method for Poetry Analysis

Directions: Use this form as a guide to assist you in the exploration and analysis of a poem. Provide thoughtful answers to each of the following, and then include your own impressions, curiosities, and personal reactions to the work. When answering the following, refer to the poem in order to quote the work directly when needed.

**Title:** Ponder the title before reading the poem.
- Does this work have a title?
- If the poem has no title, is there a reason it does not?
- What does the title imply about the poem that follows?

**Paraphrase:** Translate the poem into your own words.
- What is this poem about?
- What is the action of the poem (what happens)?

**Perspective:** Identify the perspective of the speaker in the poem.
- From whose perspective is the poem told?
- What is stated about this speaker?
- What can be implied about this speaker?
- Is this speaker the poet?
- Is this speaker a storyteller?
- How reliable is the speaker?
- How formal does this speaker intend to be?

**Craft:** Contemplate the poem for meaning beyond the literal level.
- Describe the craft by which the poet created meaning.
- Note the literary devices and explain how their use creates meaning.
- Note the rhetorical devices and explain how their use creates meaning.
- Note the structural devices (patterns of form) and explain how their use creates meaning.

**Attitude:** Observe both the speaker’s and the poet’s attitude (tone).
- Explain how the speaker feels about his/her topic.
- Do you think the poet feels differently than the speaker about the topic of the poem? Why?
- What words best describe the relationship between speaker and topic?
- How formal or intimate is that relationship?
- Is this the usual relationship one would expect? Why or why not?
Shift: A shift is a change in meaning, mood, feeling, subject, attitude, theme, speaker, or form. Close attention to the multiple shifts in a poem is important in seeing how a poem “works” and what it is saying.

- Look for the following to find shifts:
  1. Key words (but, yet, however, although)
  2. Punctuation (dashes, periods, colons, ellipsis)
  3. Stanza division
  4. Changes in line or stanza length or both.
  5. Irony (sometimes irony hides shifts)
  6. Effect of structure on meaning.
  7. Changes in sound (rhyme) may indicate changes in meaning.
  8. Changes in diction (slang to formal language)
  9. Changes from one speaker to another
  10. Changes in typeface (bold, italics, size of font)

- Note all shifts and explain how those shifts affect meaning.
- Note whether or not those shifts are conventional, expected, surprising, etc.

Title: Examine the title again, this time on an interpretive level.

- Is it apt? Why or why not?
- Is the title meant to be ironic?
- Does the title express the tone, subject, theme, etc.?

Theme: Identify the theme by recognizing the human experience, motivation, or condition suggested by the poem.

- What does the speaker want us to learn about life?
- How does the poet convey this message?
- How effective do you feel the speaker has been in relating the message of the poem?

- Here is a step-by-step method of identifying themes:
  1. Summarize the plot of the poem.
  2. List the subject or subjects of the poem, moving from literal subjects to abstract concepts such as war, death, discovery, etc.
  3. Determine what the poet is saying about each subject and write a complete sentence.
  4. Example:

**Plot:** In “Janet Walking” Janet awakens one morning and runs to greet her pet chicken only to discover that a bee has stung and killed the bird. The discovery desolates Janet to such a degree that her father cannot comfort her.

**Subjects:**
- A) a child’s first experience with death
- B) the loss of a pet
- C) innocence

**Themes:**
- A) Children become aware of the inevitability of death and are transformed by the knowledge.
  - The death of innocence is inevitable.
APPENDIX P

INQUIRY GROUPS LESSON PLAN

Title: Imagery and Figurative Language Review

Subject Area: English Literature and Composition

Grade Level: 12th Grade AP

Description: Small groups analyze poems from Perrine’s *Sound and Sense*. Discussing the use of imagery and figurative language, as they relate to meaning.

Objectives:
1. Students will apply concepts of sensory imagery and figurative language (simile, metaphor, personification, apostrophe, metonymy) by finding examples in poems from Perrine’s *Sound and Sense*.
2. Students will analyze the poet’s use of technique and synthesize meaning from the poem.

Materials: Perrine’s *Sound and Sense* (for each student), pencil/scratch paper, group question sheet.

Procedures:
1. Make sure that each student has brought their copy of Perrine with them.
2. Announce that they will be working with some poems today in class from Perrine, and applying some of what they learned about imagery and figurative language that they read about last night. Tell them they will be working in groups and that each group will be given a question sheet to follow. They will read their poem to the class and answer the questions for the class.
3. Place number sheets in different areas of class; announce “the ones will be over here, etc.”
4. Number students from 1 to 5, creating five groups, then allow students to break up into groups.
5. Monitor groups, assisting and asking questions about their poem, preparing them to present.
6. Allow groups to work together for about 10 minutes, then reconvene the class and have individual groups present their findings.
7. Students from other groups will be allowed to ask questions of a particular group if they do not understand.

Assessment: Groups will be assessed during group work time, for progress with application of concepts and analysis of imagery and figurative language.
Inquiry Group 1

Your group will be looking at Emily Dickinson’s poem, “A narrow Fellow in the Grass.” (SS 342) Be prepared to share your findings on this poem with the class during the group discussion that will follow.

Please identify any of the following you may find in your poem, drawing on Sound and Sense as a resource:
  A. imagery (and the senses they affect)
  B. simile
  C. metaphor (PLEASE use the information on SS 69-71 to tell us how the literal and figurative terms relate. Are they both named? Implied? Or a mix of both?)
  D. personification
  E. apostrophe
  F. metonymy

Please be prepared for a member of your group read your poem aloud to the class.

Inquiry Group 2

Your group will be looking at Philip Larkin’s poem, “Toads.” (SS 81) Be prepared to share your findings on this poem with the class during the group discussion that will follow.

Please identify any of the following you may find in your poem, drawing on Sound and Sense as a resource:
  A. imagery (and the senses they affect)
  B. simile
  C. metaphor (PLEASE use the information on SS 69-71 to tell us how the literal and figurative terms relate. Are they both named? Implied? Or a mix of both?)
  D. personification
  E. apostrophe
  F. metonymy

Please be prepared for a member of your group read your poem aloud to the class.

Inquiry Group 3

Your group will be looking at Thomas Hardy’s poem, “The Convergence of the Twain.” (SS 60) Be prepared to share your findings on this poem with the class during the group discussion that will follow.

Please identify any of the following you may find in your poem, drawing on Sound and Sense as a resource:
  A. imagery (and the senses they affect)
  B. simile
  C. metaphor (PLEASE use the information on SS 69-71 to tell us how the literal and figurative terms relate. Are they both named? Implied? Or a mix of both?)
  D. personification
  E. apostrophe
  F. metonymy

Please be prepared for a member of your group read your poem aloud to the class.
Inquiry Group 4

Your group will be looking at John Keats’ poem, “To Autumn.” (SS 65) Be prepared to share your findings on this poem with the class during the group discussion that will follow.

Please identify any of the following you may find in your poem, drawing on Sound and Sense as a resource:
   A. imagery (and the senses they affect)
   B. simile
   C. metaphor (PLEASE use the information on SS 69-71 to tell us how the literal and figurative terms relate. Are they both named? Implied? Or a mix of both?)
   D. personification
   E. apostrophe
   F. metonymy

Please be prepared for a member of your group read your poem aloud to the class.

Inquiry Group 5

Your group will be looking at John Donne’s poem, “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning.” (SS 83) Be prepared to share your findings on this poem with the class during the group discussion that will follow.

Please identify any of the following you may find in your poem, drawing on Sound and Sense as a resource:
   A. imagery (and the senses they affect)
   B. simile
   C. metaphor (PLEASE use the information on SS 69-71 to tell us how the literal and figurative terms relate. Are they both named? Implied? Or a mix of both?)
   D. personification
   E. apostrophe
   F. metonymy

Please be prepared for a member of your group read your poem aloud to the class.
APPENDIX Q

APPROVAL FOR THE USE OF HUMAN SUBJECTS

Florida State University
Office of the Vice President
For Research
Tallahassee, Florida 32306-2763
(850) 644-8633 - FAX (850) 644-4392

APPROVAL MEMORANDUM
Human Subjects Committee

Date: 1/29/2004

Jeremy Brannon
705 W Jefferson St
Tallahassee FL 32304

Dept.: English Education

From: John Tomkowiak, Chair

Re: Use of Human Subjects in Research
    Learning Gains in a 12th grade Advanced Placement classroom: Poetic Conventions, Analysis, and Composition

The forms that you submitted to this office in regard to the use of human subjects in the proposal referenced above have been reviewed by the Human Subjects Committee at its meeting on 1/14/2004. Your project was approved by the Committee.

The Human Subjects Committee has not evaluated your proposal for scientific merit, except to weight the risk to the human participants and the aspects of the proposal related to potential risk and benefit. This approval does not replace any departmental or other approvals which may be required.

If the project has not been completed by 1/13/2005 you must request renewed approval for continuation of the project.

You are advised that any change in protocol in this project must be approved by resubmission of the project to the Committee for approval. Also, the principal investigator must promptly report, in writing, any unexpected problems causing risks to research subjects or others.

By copy of this memorandum, the chairman of your department and/or your major professor is reminded that he/she is responsible for being informed concerning research projects involving human subjects in the department, and should review protocols of such investigations as often as needed to insure that the project is being conducted in compliance with our institution and with DHHS regulations.

This institution has an Assurance on file with the Office for Protection from Research Risks. The Assurance Number is IRB00000446.

cc: Dr. Susan Wood
    HSC No. 2003.765
Informed Assent Form
For Mrs. Dunlap’s 2nd period, 12th grade AP Literature Class, Spring 2004

I freely and voluntarily, and without force or coercion assent to be a participant in the thesis research project “Learning Gains in a 12th-grade Advanced Placement Classroom: Poetic Conventions, Analysis, and Composition.”

This research is being conducted by Jeremy Brannon, a student at Florida State University. I understand that the purpose is to help him and others understand learning in a 12th grade classroom.

The duration of my participation is the several week period during which the unit on writing about poetry will be taught. I understand that the researcher will take notes on the class’s progress during this period of time, and will use my work as part of the project.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and will not affect my grade in any way. I may stop participating at any time. All of my work will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law, and a pseudonym will be used instead of my name in any publication of this subject.

I understand that there is no greater risk involved if I agree to participate in this study than attending any class at Chiles High School. No additional work will be required of me than would normally be assigned as part of my class.

I understand that there are benefits for participating in this project. Not only will my knowledge and appreciation of poetry increase, but I will gain insight into my own learning process and the research process used in major universities.

I understand that my assent may be withdrawn at any time without prejudice, penalty, or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. I have been given the right to ask questions about the study.

I understand that I may contact Mrs. Jan Dunlap (488-1756, ext. 290), Mr. Jeremy Brannon (224-7874), or FSU’s Human Subjects Review Board (644-8836) with questions about this research. I have read and understand this consent form.

_________________________  ______________________
Subject                        Date

_________________________
Parent name
Informed Consent Form  
For Mrs. Dunlap’s 2nd period, 12th grade AP Literature Class, Spring 2004

I freely and voluntarily, and without force or coercion consent to my child’s participation in the thesis research project “Learning Gains in a 12th-grade Advanced Placement Classroom: Poetic Conventions, Analysis, and Composition.”

This research is being conducted by Jeremy Brannon, a student at Florida State University. I understand that the purpose is to help him and others understand learning in a 12th grade classroom.

The duration of my child’s participation is the several week period during which the unit on writing about poetry will be taught. I understand that the researcher will take notes on the class’s progress during this period of time, and will use work from the class as part of the project.

I understand that my child’s participation is voluntary and will not affect my child’s grade in any way. I may withdraw consent at any time. All of my child’s work will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law, and a pseudonym will be used instead of my child’s name in any publication of this subject.

I understand that there is no greater risk involved if I agree to allow my child to participate in this study than them attending any class at Chiles High School. No additional work will be required of my child than would normally be assigned as part of class.

I understand that there are benefits for participating in this project. Not only will my child’s knowledge and appreciation of poetry increase, but my child will gain insight into his/her own learning process and the research process used in major universities.

I understand that my consent may be withdrawn at any time without prejudice, penalty, or loss of benefits to which my child is otherwise entitled. I have been given the right to ask questions about the study.

I understand that I may contact Mrs. Jan Dunlap (488-1756 ext. 290), Mr. Jeremy Brannon (224-7874), Dr. Susan Wood (644-1909), or FSU’s Human Subjects Review Board (644-8836) with questions about this research. I have read and understand this consent form.

Child’s Name

Date

Parent Signature
REFERENCES


DiYanni, R. (2002). The origins and development of the AP, the College Board’s Advanced Placement Program: part I, American beginnings and American successes. *International Schools Journal*, (22)1, 31-42.


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jeremy R. Brannon was born on May 29th, 1975 in Louisville, Kentucky. After earning a Bachelor of Arts degree in English from Florida State University in 1997, he worked for several years in Christian campus ministry. In 2001, he began a new job at the drug treatment program, where he realized his potential to become a teacher while working with adolescent boys. In the Fall of 2004, he will begin employment at Lake Brantley High School in Altamonte Springs, Florida, where he will teach 9th grade English.